

STUDIES IN JUDAISM

FIRST SERIES

BY

S. SCHECHTER, M.A., LITT.D.



PHILADELPHIA

THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY OF AMERICA

1911

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Set up and electrotyped. Published April, 1896. Reprinted
July, 1905; June, 1911.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

TO
THE EVER-CHERISHED MEMORY
OF
THE LATE DR. P. F. FRANKL, RABBI IN BERLIN
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PREFACE

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THESE studies appeared originally in their first form in The Jewish Quarterly and The Jewish Chronicle. To the Editors of these periodicals my best thanks are due for their readiness in placing the articles at my disposal for the purposes of the present volume. The Introductory Essay is new. I desire to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. J. G. Frazer, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Dr. J. Sutherland Black, of London, for their great kindness in revising the proofs, and for many a valuable suggestion. To Mr. Claude G. Montefiore I am indebted for the English version of the Essay on "Chassidim" — my first literary effort in this country, written at his own suggestion.

In the transliteration of Hebrew names, I have given the familiar English forms of the authorised version. As regards post-Biblical names, I have with few exceptions followed Zedner's Catalogue of the Hebrew Books in the Library of the British Museum. A Hebrew word will be found here and there in the text; I have purposely avoided bewildering devices for representing the actual sound of the word, contenting myself with the ordinary Roman alphabet, in spite of its shortcomings.

The authorities used for the various Essays will be found indicated in the Notes at the end of the volume, where the reader will also find short biographical and bibliographical notices, together with brief explanations of technical terms for which no exact equivalent exists in English. The index will, it is hoped, facilitate reference.

S. S.

CAMBRIDGE, February 1896.

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INTRODUCTION

THE essays published in this volume under the title of *Studies in Judaism* have been written on various occasions and at long intervals. There is thus no necessary connection between them. If some sort of unity may be detected in the book, it can only be between the first three essays — on the Chassidim, Krochmal, and the Gaon — in which there is a certain unity of purpose. The purpose in view was, as may easily be gathered from the essays themselves, to bring under the notice of the English public a type of men produced by the Synagogue of the Eastern Jews. That Synagogue is widely different from ours. Its places of worship have no claims to “beauty of holiness,” being in their outward appearance rather bare and bald, if not repulsive; whilst those who frequent them are a noisy, excitable people, who actually dance on the “Season of Rejoicing” and cry bitterly on the “Days of Mourning.” But among all these vagaries — or perhaps because of them — this Synagogue has had its moments of grace, when enthusiasm wedded to inspiration gave birth to such beautiful souls as Baalshem, such fine sceptics as Krochmal, and such saintly scholars as Elijah Wilna. The Synagogue of the West is certainly of a more presentable character, and free from excesses; though it is not devoid of an enthusiasm of its own which

finds its outlet in an ardent and self-sacrificing philanthropic activity. But owing to its practical tendency there is too little room in it for that play of intellectual forces which finds its extravagant expression in the saint on the one hand, and the learned heretic on the other.

Eight of these essays are more or less of a theological nature. But in reading the proofs I have been struck by the fact that there is assumed in them a certain conception of the Synagogue which, familiar though it be to the Jewish student, may appear obscure and even strange to the general English reader. For brevity's sake I will call it the High Synagogue, though it does not correspond in all details to what one is accustomed to understand under the term of High Church. The High Synagogue has a history which is not altogether without its points of interest.

Some years ago when the waves of the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament reached the shores of this country, and such questions as the heterogeneous composition of the Pentateuch, the comparatively late date of the Levitical Legislation, and the post-exilic origin of certain Prophecies as well as of the Psalms began to be freely discussed by the press and even in the pulpit, the invidious remark was often made: What will now become of Judaism when its last stronghold, the Law, is being shaken to its very foundations?

Such a remark shows a very superficial acquaintance with the nature of an old historical religion like Judaism, and the richness of the resources it has to fall back upon in cases of emergency.

As a fact, the emergency did not quite surprise Judaism. The alarm signal was given some 150 years ago by an

Italian Rabbi, Abiad Sar Shalom Bazilai, in his pamphlet *The Faith of the Sages*. The pamphlet is, as the title indicates, of a polemical character, reviewing the work of the Jewish rationalistic schools; and after warming up in his attacks against their heterodox views, Bazilai exclaims: "Nature and simple meaning, they are our misfortune." By "nature and simple meaning" Bazilai, who wrote in Hebrew, understood what we would call Natural Science and Philology. With the right instinct of faith, Bazilai hit on the real sore points. For though he mostly argues against the philosophical systems of Aristotle and his commentators, he felt that it is not speculation that will ever seriously endanger religion. There is hardly any metaphysical system, old or new, which has not in course of time been adapted by able dialecticians to the creed which they happened to hold. In our own time we have seen the glorious, though not entirely novel spectacle, of Agnosticism itself becoming the rightful handmaid of Queen Theology. The real danger lies in "nature" (or Natural Science) with its stern demand of law and regularity in all phenomena, and in the "simple meaning" (or Philology) with its inconsiderate insistence on truth. Of the two, the "simple meaning" is the more objectionable. Not only is it very often at variance with Tradition, which has its own code of interpretation, but it is constantly increasing the difficulties raised by science. For if words could only have more than one meaning, there would be no objection to reading the first words of Genesis, "In a beginning God evolved." The difficulties of science would then be disposed of easily enough. Maimonides, who was as bold an interpreter as he was a deep metaphysician, hinted plainly enough that were he as con-

vinced of the eternity of matter as he was satisfied of the impossibility of any corporeal quality in the deity, he would feel as little compunction in explaining (figuratively) the contents of the first chapter of Genesis as he did in allegorising the anthropomorphic passages of the Bible. Thus in the end all the difficulties resolve themselves into the one great difficulty of the "simple meaning." The best way to meet this difficulty was found to be to shift the centre of gravity in Judaism and to place it in the secondary meaning, thus making religion independent of philology and all its dangerous consequences.

This shifting work was chiefly done, perhaps not quite consciously, by the historical school which followed upon that of Mendelssohn and his first successors. The historical school, which is still in the ascendant, comprises many of the best Jewish writers who either by their learning or by their ecclesiastical profession as Rabbis and preachers in great communities have acquired some important position among their brethren. The men who have inaugurated this movement were Krochmal (1785-1841), Rapoport (1790-1867), and Zunz (1794-1886).

It is not a mere coincidence that the first representatives of the historical school were also the first Jewish scholars who proved themselves more or less ready to join the modern school of Bible Criticism, and even to contribute their share to it. The first two, Krochmal and Rapoport, early in the second quarter of this century accepted and defended the modern view about a second Isaiah, the post-exilic origin of many Psalms, and the late date of Ecclesiastes; whilst Zunz, who began (in 1832) with denying the authenticity of Ezekiel, concluded his literary career (1873) with a study on the Bible (*Gesam-*

melte Schriften, i. pp. 217-290), in which he expressed his view "that the Book of Leviticus dates from a later period than the Book of Deuteronomy, later even than Ezekiel, having been composed during the age of the Second Temple, when there already existed a well-established priesthood which superintended the sacrificial worship." But when Revelation or the Written Word is reduced to the level of history, there is no difficulty in elevating history in its aspect of Tradition to the rank of Scripture, for both have then the same human or divine origin (according to the student's predilection for the one or the other adjective), and emanate from the same authority. Tradition becomes thus the means whereby the modern divine seeks to compensate himself for the loss of the Bible, and the theological balance is to the satisfaction of all parties happily readjusted.

Jewish Tradition, or, as it is commonly called, the Oral Law, or, as we may term it (in consideration of its claims to represent an interpretation of the Bible), the Secondary Meaning of the Scriptures, is mainly embodied in the works of the Rabbis and their subsequent followers during the Middle Ages. Hence the zeal and energy with which the historical school applied itself to the Jewish post-biblical literature, not only elucidating its texts by means of new critical editions, dictionaries, and commentaries, but also trying to trace its origins and to pursue its history through its gradual development. To the work of Krochmal in this direction a special essay is devoted in this volume. The labours of Rapoport are more of a biographical and bibliographical nature, being occupied mostly with the minor details in the lives and writings of various famous Jewish Rabbis in the Middle Ages; thus

they offer but little opportunity for general theological comment. Of more importance in this respect are the hints thrown out in his various works by Zunz, who was just as emphatic in asserting the claims of Tradition as he was advanced in his views on Bible criticism. Zunz's greatest work is *Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge*—an awkward title, which in fact means "The History of the Interpretation of the Scriptures as forming a part of the divine service." Now if a work displaying such wide learning and critical acumen, and written in such an impartial spirit can be said to have a bias, it was towards bridging over the seemingly wide gap between the Written Word (the Scriptures) and the Spoken Word (the Oral Law or Tradition), which was the more deeply felt, as most of Zunz's older contemporaries were men, grown up in the habits of thought of the eighteenth century—a century distinguished both for its ignorance of, and its power of ignoring, the teachings of history. Indeed it would seem that ages employed in making history have no time for studying it.

Zunz accomplished the task he set himself, by showing, as already indicated, the late date of certain portions of the Bible, which by setting the early history of Israel in an ideal light betray the moralising tendency of their authors, and are, in fact, little more than a traditional interpretation of older portions of Scripture, adapted to the religious needs of the time. Placing thus the origin of Tradition in the Bible itself, it was a comparatively easy matter for Zunz to prove its further continuity. Prophecy and Interpretation are with him the natural expressions of the religious life of the nation; and though by the loss of Israel's political independence the voice of

the prophets gradually died away, the voice of God was still heard. Israel continues to consult God through the medium of the Scriptures, and He answers His people by the mouth of the Scribes, the Sages, the Interpreters of the Law; whilst the liturgy of the Synagogue, springing up at the time when Psalms were still being composed, expands in its later stages through the work of the Poets of the Synagogue into such a rich luxuriance "that it forms in itself a treasure of history, poetry, philosophy; and prophecy and psalms are again revived in the hymnology of the Middle Ages." This is in brief the lesson to be learned from Zunz's *Gottesdienstliche Vorträge* as far as it deals with the significance of Tradition; and it is in the introduction to this work that Zunz expresses himself to the following effect: Indispensable is the free Spoken Word. Mankind has acquired all its ideal treasures only by Word of Mouth; an education continuing through all stages of life. In Israel, too, the Word of Instruction transmitted from mouth to mouth was never silenced.

The historical school has never, to my knowledge, offered to the world a theological programme of its own. By the nature of its task, its labours are mostly conducted in the field of philology and archæology, and it pays but little attention to purely dogmatic questions. On the whole, its attitude towards religion may be defined as an enlightened Scepticism combined with a staunch conservatism which is not even wholly devoid of a certain mystical touch. As far as we may gather from vague remarks and hints thrown out now and then, its theological position may perhaps be thus defined:—It is not the mere revealed Bible that is of first importance to the Jew, but the Bible as it repeats itself in history, in other words, as it is

interpreted by Tradition. The Talmud, that wonderful mine of religious ideas from which it would be just as easy to draw up a manual for the most orthodox as to extract a vade-mecum for the most sceptical, lends some countenance to this view by certain controversial passages — not to be taken seriously — in which “the words of the scribes” are placed almost above the words of the Torah. Since then the interpretation of Scripture or the Secondary Meaning is mainly a product of changing historical influences, it follows that the centre of authority is actually removed from the Bible and placed in some *living body*, which, by reason of its being in touch with the ideal aspirations and the religious needs of the age, is best able to determine the nature of the Secondary Meaning. This living body, however, is not represented by any section of the nation, or any corporate priesthood, or Rabbihood, but by the collective conscience of Catholic Israel as embodied in the Universal Synagogue. The Synagogue “with its long, continuous cry after God for more than twenty-three centuries,” with its unremittent activity in teaching and developing the word of God, with its uninterrupted succession of prophets, Psalmists, Scribes, Assideans, Rabbis, Patriarchs, Interpreters, Elucidators, Eminences, and Teachers, with its glorious record of Saints, martyrs, sages, philosophers, scholars, and mystics; this Synagogue, the only true witness to the past, and forming in all ages the sublimest expression of Israel’s religious life, must also retain its authority as the sole true guide for the present and the future. And being in communion with this Synagogue, we may also look hopefully for a safe and rational solution of our present theological troubles. For was it not the Synagogue which even in

antiquity determined the fate of Scripture? On the one hand, for example, books like Ezekiel, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes, were only declared to be Holy Writ in virtue of the interpretation put upon them by the Rabbis: and, on the other hand, it was the veto of the Rabbis which excluded from the canon the works that now pass under the name of Apocrypha. We may, therefore, safely trust that the Synagogue will again assert its divine right in passing judgment upon the Bible when it feels called upon to exercise that holy office. It is "God who has chosen the Torah, and Moses His servant, and Israel His people." But indeed God's choice invariably coincides with the wishes of Israel; He "performeth all things" upon which the councils of Israel, meeting under promise of the Divine presence and communion, have previously agreed. As the Talmud somewhere expresses itself with regard to the Book of Esther, "They have confirmed above what Israel has accepted below."

Another consequence of this conception of Tradition is that it is neither Scripture nor primitive Judaism, but general custom which forms the real rule of practice. Holy Writ as well as history, Zunz tells us, teaches that the law of Moses was never fully and absolutely put in practice. Liberty was always given to the great teachers of every generation to make modifications and innovations in harmony with the spirit of existing institutions. Hence a return to Mosaism would be illegal, pernicious, and indeed impossible. The norm as well as the sanction of Judaism is the practice actually in vogue. Its consecration is the consecration of general use,—or, in other words, of Catholic Israel. It was probably with a view to this communion that the later mystics introduced a short prayer to

be said before the performance of any religious ceremony, in which, among other things, the speaker professes his readiness to act "in the name of all Israel."

It would be out of place in an introductory essay to pursue any further this interesting subject with its far-reaching consequences upon Jewish life and Jewish thought. But the foregoing remarks may suffice to show that Judaism did not remain quite inactive at the approach of the great religious crisis which our generation has witnessed. Like so many other religious communities, it reviewed its forces, entrenched itself on the field of history, and what it lost of its old devotion to the Bible, it has sought to make up by a renewed reverence for institutions.

In this connection, a mere mention may suffice of the ultra-Orthodox party, led by the late Dr. S. R. Hirsch of Frankfort (1808-1889) whose defiance of reason and criticism even a Ward might have envied, and whose saintliness and sublimity even a Keble might have admired. And, to take an example from the opposite school, we must at least record the name of that devout Jew, Osias Schorr (1816-1895), in whom we have profound learning combined with an uncompromising disposition of mind productive of a typical champion of Radicalism in things religious. These men are, however, representative of two extremes, and their followers constitute mere minorities; the majority is with the historical school.

How long the position of this school will prove tenable is another question. Being brought up in the old Low Synagogue, where, with all attachment to tradition, the Bible was looked upon as the crown and the climax of Judaism, the old Adam still asserts itself in me, and in

unguarded moments makes me rebel against this new rival of revelation in the shape of history. At times this now fashionable exaltation of Tradition at the expense of Scripture even impresses me as a sort of religious bimetalism in which bold speculators in theology try to keep up the market value of an inferior currency by denouncing loudly the bright shining gold which, they would have us believe, is less fitted to circulate in the vulgar use of daily life than the small cash of historical interpretation. Nor can I quite reconcile myself to this alliance of religion with history, which seems to me both unworthy and unnatural. The Jew, some writer aptly remarked, was the first and the fiercest Nonconformist of the East, and so Judaism was always a protesting religion. To break the idols, whether of the past or of the present, has always been a sacred mission of Judaism, and has indeed been esteemed by it as a necessary preliminary to the advent of the kingdom of God on earth. One of its daily prayers was and still is: "We therefore hope in Thee, O Lord our God, that we may speedily behold the glory of Thy might, when . . . the idols will be cut off, when the world will be perfected under the kingdom of the Almighty." It bowed before truth, but it had never made a covenant with facts only because they were facts. History had to be re-made and to sanctify itself before it found its way into its sacred annals. Nor did Judaism make a virtue of swallowing down institutions. Such institutions as crept into it in course of time had, when the Synagogue was conscious of their claims to form part of religion, to submit to the laborious process of a thorough adaptation to prophetic notions before they were formally sanctioned. But when this process was deemed impossible or impracti

cable, Judaism boldly denounced the past in such fierce language as the prophets used and as still finds its echo in such passages of the liturgy as "First our ancestors were worshippers of idols and now God has brought us near to His service"; or "But of a truth, we and our ancestors have sinned."

However, it would be unfair to argue any further against a theological system which, as already said, was never avowed distinctly by the historical school—a school, moreover, with which speculation is a matter of minor importance. The main strength of this school lies in its scientific work, for which Judaism will always be under a sense of deep gratitude. And living as we do in an age in which history reigns supreme in all departments of human thought, we may hope that even its theology, as far as it goes, will "do" for us, though I neither hope nor believe that it will do for those who come after us. I may, however, humbly confess that the sixth essay in this volume was written in a spirit of rebellion against this all-absorbing Catholic Israel, with its decently veiled scepticism on the one hand, and its unfortunate tendency with many people to degenerate into a soulless conformity on the other hand. There is, I am afraid, not much to be said in favour of this essay. It is deficient both in matter and in style. It proved to be a futile attempt to bring within the compass of an essay what a whole book could hardly do justice to. The Hebrew documents bearing upon the question of dogma which I have collected from various manuscripts and rare printed books, would alone make a fair-sized volume. I only venture to offer it to the public in the absence of anything better; since, so far as I know, no other attempt has ever been made to treat

the subject even in its meagrest outlines. I even venture to hope that, with all its shortcomings, it will contribute something towards destroying the illusion, in which so many theologians indulge, that Judaism is a religion without dogmas. To declare that a religion has no dogmas is tantamount to saying that it was wise enough not to commit itself to any vital principles. But prudence, useful as it may be in worldly affairs, is quite unworthy of a great spiritual power.

Jewish mysticism in the Middle Ages and in modern times is represented in this volume by two essays ("The Chassidim" and "Nachmanides"). But in order to avoid mistakes which might be implied by my silence, I think it desirable to state that there are also to be found many mystical elements in the old Rabbinic literature. Mysticism, not as a theosophic system or as an occult science, but as a manifestation of the spiritual and as an expression of man's agonies in his struggle after communion with God, as well as of his ineffable joy when he receives the assurance that he has found it, is not, as some maintain, foreign to the spirit of old Rabbinic Judaism. There was no need for the mediæval Rabbi to borrow the elements of such a mysticism from non-Jewish sources. The perusal of the old Homilies on the Song of Songs, and on the Lessons from the Prophets, or even a fair acquaintance with the Jewish liturgy would, in itself, suffice to refute such baseless assertions. Those who are at all familiar with old Rabbinic literature hardly need to be told that "the sea of the Talmud" has also its gulf stream of mysticism which, taking its origin in the moralising portions of the Bible, runs through the wide ocean of Jewish thought, constantly commingling with the icy waters of legalism, and

unceasingly washing the desolate shores of an apparently meaningless ceremonialism, communicating to it life, warmth, and spirituality. To draw attention to this fact a humble attempt has been made in the ninth essay, "The Law and Recent Criticism," a subject which I have essayed to expound in a series of essays on "Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology," now appearing in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*.

The last five essays touch rather on certain social and familiar aspects of Judaism, and need no further comment. They are mere *causeries* and hardly deserve the name of studies. Perhaps it may be useful for those who judge of the heaviness of a work by its bulk to know that there is also a lighter side of Rabbinic literature.

But I shall be better pleased if the more serious side of this volume — Jewish mysticism and Rabbinic theology — should attract the attention of students, and so draw some fellow-workers into a field which is utterly neglected. Notwithstanding the numerous Manuals and Introductions which all more or less touch on the subject of Rabbinic theology, there is, after nearly 250 years, not a single work among them which, either in knowledge of facts or in their interpretation, is a single step in advance of the Cambridge Platonist, John Smith, in his *Select Discourses*. But those who try so hard to determine the miraculous distance of Christianity by the eclipses in Rabbinism, should, if they wish to be just or prove themselves worthy scholars, also endeavour to make themselves acquainted with the numberless bright stars that move in the wide universe of Jewish thought. We are often told that no creed or theological system which has come down to us from antiquity can afford to be judged by any other standard

than by its spiritual and poetic *possibilities*: this indulgence Judaism is as justly entitled to claim as any other religion. The great and saintly Franz Delitzsch who, born with an intellect of admirable temper, was also endowed by Heaven with a soul—and a beautiful soul it was—was one of the few theologians who, partly at least, admitted this claim, and sought earnestly and diligently after these spiritual and poetic possibilities, and was amply rewarded for his labours.

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I

THE CHASSIDIM¹

THROUGHOUT the whole of that interesting field of Theological Literature which deals with the genesis and course of religious movements, there is probably none whose history, even whose name, is so little known to English students, as that of the Chassidim. And yet it would be difficult to point, in comparatively recent times, to a Dissenting movement more strikingly complete in its development, more suggestive of analogy, more full of interest in its original purpose, more pregnant of warning in its decay.

The Hebrew word "Chassidim"² merely means "the Pious," and appears to have been complacently adopted by the early apostles of the sect. But the thing — Chassidism — was, in its inception at all events, a revolt among the Jews of Eastern Europe against the excessive casuistry of the contemporary Rabbis. It was in fact one more manifestation of the yearning of the human heart towards the Divine idea, and of its ceaseless craving for direct communion with God. It was the protest of an emotional but uneducated people against a one-sided expression of Judaism, presented to them in cold and over-subtle disquisitions which not only did they not understand, but which shut out the play of the feelings

and the affections, so that religion was made almost impossible to them.

Some account of the sect is the more necessary because, although the Chassidim have not been wholly ignored by historians or novelists, the references to them have generally, for perfectly intelligible reasons, been either biased or inaccurate. The historians who have treated of them have been almost exclusively men saturated with Western culture and rationalism. To them the rude and uncouth manifestations of an undisciplined religious spirit could not be other than repellent; to them Chassidism was a movement to be dismissed as unæsthetic and irrational.

To the purposes of fiction the romantic side of Chassidism lends itself readily, but the novelists who have used this material have confined themselves to its externals. Indeed, to have done more would have involved a tedious and unremunerative study of difficult Hebrew texts, an undertaking not to be expected from the most conscientious writers of this class. Thus Franzos in his references to the Jews of Barnow describes faithfully the outer signs of the man, his long coat and tangled curls, but the inner life, the world in which the Chassid moved and had his being, was unknown to him and is therefore unrecorded.

As to my treatment of the subject, I confess that there was a time when I loved the Chassidim as there was a time when I hated them. And even now I am not able to suppress these feelings. I have rather tried to guide my feelings in such a way as to love in Chassidism what is ideal and noble, and to hate in it what turned out bad and pernicious for Judaism. How far I have been successful is another question. At least I have endeavoured to write this paper in such a spirit. But of one thing I

must warn the reader — the desire to give some clear notion of the leading ideas of Chassidism has compelled me to quote some passages in which the Chassidim have spoken in very offensive terms of their opponents. In justice to these I must remark that unfortunately religious struggles are usually conducted on the most irreligious principles. Thus the Chassidim imputed to their antagonists, the contemporary Rabbis, many vices from which they were free. Certainly, there was, as one can read in every history of Jewish religion, something wrong in the state of Judaism. But I know people who maintain that there is something very wrong in the present state of Judaism, and who despair of a regeneration. But surely this is a silly exaggeration. The Chassidim also exaggerated. It would be better to take but little notice of their accusations and dwell more on that which was spoken in a kind and loving spirit.

As to the literature of the subject, I can only say here that I have made use of every book I could consult, both in English and in foreign libraries. But I cannot pledge myself to be what early Jewish writers called "a donkey which carries books." I exercise my own choice and my own judgment on many points.

As an active force for good, Chassidism was short-lived. For, as I propose to show, there lurked among its central tenets the germs of the degeneracy which so speedily came upon it. But its early purposes were high, its doctrines fairly pure, its aspirations ideal and sublime.

The founder of the sect was one Israel Baalshem,³ and the story of his parentage, birth, and childhood, and the current anecdotes of his subsequent career play a considerable part in Chassidic literature. But the authentic

materials for his biography are everywhere interwoven with much that is pure legend and with much more that is miraculous. This was, perhaps, inevitable, and is certainly not an unfamiliar feature in the personal histories of religious reformers as presented by their followers and devotees.

The sayings and doings of Baalshem are an essential — perhaps the most essential — portion of any account of the sect. For Baalshem is the centre of the Chassidic world, and Chassidism is so intimately bound up with the personality of its founder that any separation between them is well nigh impossible. To the Chassidim Baalshem is not a man who established a theory or set forth a system; he himself was the incarnation of a theory and his whole life the revelation of a system.

Even those portions of his history which are plainly legendary have their uses in indicating the ideals and in illustrating the aspirations of the early Chassidim; while their circulation and the ready credence they received are valuable evidence of the real power and influence of Baalshem's personality.

In the tale as told by the sect little is omitted of those biographical accessories which are proper to an Avatar. There is all the conventional heralding of a pre-ordained advent; all the usual signs and portents of a new dispensation may be recognised in the almost preternatural virtues of Baalshem's parents, in the miraculous annunciation and exceptional circumstances of his nativity, and in the early indication of a strong and fearless individuality. Everywhere it seems to be suggested that Baalshem from his infancy was conscious of a lofty mission. It is already in tender years that he is made

to give evidence of an indifference to conventional restraints and accepted ideals.

Rabbi Eliezer and his wife, the parents of Baalshem, dwelt, as the story goes, in Moldavia. They are described as a pious and God-fearing couple, who, when they had already reached old age, were still childless. They are accredited with a spotless rectitude, which was unimpaired by a long series of strange vicissitudes and misfortunes.

Ultimately, an angel of God appeared to Eliezer and announced that, as he had successfully withstood all the temptations and sufferings by which he had been tried, God was about to reward him with a son, who was destined to enlighten the eyes of all Israel. Therefore his name should be Israel, for in him the words of Scripture were to be fulfilled, "Thou art my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." In due course the promise was fulfilled, and to the aged couple a son was born, who was named Israel according to the angel's word. The date of Baalshem's birth is about 1700; his birthplace, in Bukowina, in a hitherto unidentified village which the authorities call Ukop, then still belonging to Roumania. The child's mother died soon after he was weaned, and his father did not long survive her. But before Eliezer died he took his child in his arms, and blessing him, bade him fear naught, for God would always be with him.

As Eliezer had been greatly honoured in the community in which he lived, his orphan son was carefully tended and educated. He was early supplied with an instructor in the Holy Law. But though he learned with rare facility, he rejected the customary methods of instruction. One day, while still quite young, his teacher missed him,

and on seeking found him sitting alone in the forest that skirted his native village, in happy and fearless solitude. He repeated this escapade so often that it was thought best to leave him to follow his own bent. A little later we find him engaged as assistant to a schoolmaster. His duty was not to teach, but to take the children from their homes to the synagogue and thence on to the school. It was his wont while accompanying the children to the synagogue to teach them solemn hymns which he sang with them. In the synagogue he encouraged them to sing the responses, so that the voices of the children penetrated through the heavens and moved the Divine father to compassion. Satan, fearing lest his power on earth should thereby be diminished, assumed the shape of a werewolf, and, appearing before the procession of children on their way to the synagogue, put them to flight. In consequence of this alarming incident the children's services were suspended. But Israel, recollecting his father's counsel to fear naught, besought the parents to be allowed to lead the children once more in the old way. His request was granted, and when the werewolf appeared a second time Israel attacked him with a club and routed him.

In his fourteenth year Israel became a beadle at the Beth Hammidrash.⁴ Here he assiduously but secretly pursued the study of the Law. Yet, being anxious that none should know his design, he read and worked only at night, when the schoolroom was empty and the usual scholars had retired. During the daytime he slept, so that he was popularly believed to be both ignorant and lazy. Despite these precautions, however, his true character was revealed to one person. A certain holy

man, the father of a young student at the college, had discovered some old manuscripts which contained the deepest secrets. Before his death he bade his son repair to Ukop, Israel's birthplace, telling him that he would find one Israel, son of Eliezer, to whom the precious documents were to be entrusted. They possessed, so the old man declared, a certain mystic and heavenly affinity with Israel's soul. The student carried out his father's instructions, and at last discovered the object of his search in the beadle of the Beth Hammidrash. Israel admitted him to his friendship and confidence on the condition of secrecy as to his real character. The student, however, paid dearly for this acquaintance with Israel. Contrary to Baalshem's advice, he entered upon a dangerous incantation in the course of which he made a mistake so serious that it cost him his life.

500 Upon the death of his friend, Baalshem left his native village and settled as a teacher in a small town near Brody. Here, although his true mission and character were still unknown, he became much respected for his rigid probity, and was frequently chosen as umpire in disputes among Jews. On one of these occasions he arbitrated with so much learning and impartiality that not only did he satisfy both parties, but one of them, a learned man of Brody, named Abraham, offered him his own daughter in marriage. Israel, to whom it had been revealed that Abraham's daughter was his predestined wife, immediately accepted the offer and the act of betrothal was drawn up. But wishing his true character to remain unknown he stipulated that Abraham, although a "Talmid Chacham" (student)⁵ himself and therefore presumably desirous that his daughter should marry a scholar,

should omit from the betrothal-deed all the titles of honour usually appended to the name of a learned bridegroom. While returning to Brody, Abraham died, and Gershon his son, a scholar still greater and more celebrated than his father, was surprised and shocked to find a deed of betrothal among his father's papers, from which it appeared that his sister was to wed a man with apparently no claim to scholarship or learning. He protested to his sister, but she declined to entertain any objections to a marriage which her father had arranged. When the time for the wedding was at hand, Israel gave up his post as teacher, and repaired to Brody. Disguised as a peasant he presented himself before his future brother-in-law, who was then fulfilling some high judicial function. Gershon taking him for a beggar offered him alms, but Israel, refusing the money, asked for a private interview, stating that he had an important secret to reveal. He then, to Gershon's surprise and disgust, explained who he was and that he had come to claim his bride. As the girl was determined to obey her father's will the affair was settled and the day fixed. On the morning of the wedding Israel revealed to his bride his real character and mission, at the same time enjoining secrecy. Evil fortunes would befall them, he said, but a better time would eventually follow.

After the wedding, Gershon, having in vain attempted to instruct his seemingly ignorant brother-in-law, decided to rid himself of his presence. He gave his sister the choice of being separated from her husband, or of leaving the town in his company. She chose the latter, and thereupon the two left Brody and began a life of hardship and suffering. Israel chose for his new home a spot on one of the spurs of the Carpathian Mountains. No Jews lived

there, and Israel and his wife were thus separated from the society of their fellows in a life of complete and unchanging solitude. Israel dug lime in the ravines among the mountains, and his wife conveyed it for sale to the nearest town. Their life at this period seems to have been one of great privation, but the harder Israel's outward lot, the more he increased in spiritual greatness. In his solitude he gave himself up entirely to devotion and religious contemplation. His habit was to climb to the summit of the mountains and wander about rapt in spiritual ecstasies. He fasted, prayed, made continual ablutions, and observed all the customary outward and inward exercises of piety and devotion.

After seven years, Gershon, who was well aware of the bitter poverty which his sister endured, relented and brought her and her husband back to Brody. At first he employed Baalshem as his coachman, but as he proved wholly unfit for this work Gershon rented a small inn in a remote village, and there established his sister and her husband. The business of the inn was managed by the wife, while Baalshem passed most of his time in a hut in a neighbouring forest. Here he once more gave himself up to meditation and preparation for his future work, and here, a little later, when nearly forty-two years of age, to a few chosen spirits, afterwards his most fervent disciples, he first revealed his true character and mission.

From this point unfortunately the materials for a continuous biography are wanting; we next hear of Baalshem discharging the functions of an ordinary Rabbi at Miedziboz in Podolia, but for the remainder of his personal history we have to be content with detached anecdotes

and fragmentary passages in his life, the sum total of which goes to show that he resided in Podolia and Wallachia, teaching his doctrines to his disciples and "working Wonders." He does not seem to have figured as a public preacher, nor has he left behind him any written work. He appears rather to have used the method, familiar to students of Greek philosophy, of teaching by conversations with his friends and disciples. These conversations, and the parables with which they were largely interspersed, were remembered and stored up by his hearers. By his neighbours the country folk, Baalshem was regarded simply as "a man of God." He was allowed to pursue his course undisturbed by persecution of the serious character which his more aggressive successors provoked. Such of the Rabbis as were aware of his existence despised him and his ways, but the Rabbinical world was at that time too much occupied in the controversy between Eybeschütz and Emden to concern itself with the vagaries of an obscure and apparently "unlearned" eccentric. Baalshem also took part in the disputes which were held in Lemberg, the capital of Galicia (1757?), between the Rabbis and the Frankists,⁶ who denounced the Talmud to the Polish Government and wanted to have all the Rabbinical books destroyed. Baalshem suffered from this excitement in a most terrible way. The abrogation of the Oral Law meant for him the ruin of Judaism.

Baalshem, in forming the little band of devoted followers who were destined to spread a knowledge of his creed, travelled considerably about Wallachia. He at one time decided to make a pilgrimage to Palestine, but when he reached Constantinople he felt himself inspired

to return and continue his work at home. He died at Miedziboz on the eve of Pentecost, 1761.

After his death his disciples, of whom one Beer of Mizriez was the most prominent, undertook the proselytising mission for which Baalshem had prepared them, but from which he himself appears to have abstained. They preached and taught in all the provinces of Russia where Jews may reside, and in Roumania, and Galicia. The number of the sect at the present day is probably about half a million.

Returning now to Baalshem the founder, it may be noted that his appearance as a teacher and reformer was accompanied and justified by a customary and adequate number of miracles. To one disciple he revealed secrets which could have become known to him only by divine revelation; to another he appeared with a nimbus round his head. On the evidence of the Chassidim we learn that Baalshem performed all the recognised signs and marvels which have ever been the customary minor characteristics of men of similar type in similar environment. When Baalshem desired to cross a stream, he spread forth his mantle upon the waters, and standing thereupon passed safely to the other side. Ghosts evacuated haunted houses at the mere mention of his name. Was he alone in the forest on a wintry night, he had but to touch a tree with his finger tips and flames burst forth. When his spirit wandered through the angelic spheres, as was frequently the case, he obtained access to Paradise for millions of pining souls who had vainly waited without through long thousands of mournful years. These and other miracles need not be examined. Here, as in the case of other such blissful seasons of grace, they were the

ephemeral though important accessories in establishing the inspired character of his utterances and the authority of his injunctions. It is not as a worker of miracles, but as a religious teacher and reformer, that Baalshem is interesting.

Properly to understand the nature and special direction of his teaching, it is necessary in some measure to realise the character of the field in which he worked; to consider, in other words, the moral and religious condition of the Jews in those districts where Chassidism first took root.

In a Hebrew Hymn, written about 1000 A.C., and still recited in the synagogue on the Day of Atonement, the poet expresses the strange and bitter fortunes of his race in touching words of mingled sorrow and exultation.

Destroyed lies Zion and profaned,
Of splendour and renown bereft,
Her ancient glories wholly waned,
One deathless treasure only left;
Still ours, O Lord,
Thy Holy Word.

And this Divine Word it was, which a persecuted religion has sought to preserve intact through so many centuries of persecution, and for the sake of which no labour seemed too severe, no sacrifice too large. "Bethink Thee, O God," exclaimed one of our Jewish sages who flourished about the same period, "bethink Thee of Thy faithful children who, amid their poverty and want, are busy in the study of Thy Law. Bethink Thee of the poor in Israel who are willing to suffer hunger and destitution if only they can secure for their children the knowledge of Thy Law." And so indeed it was. Old and

young, weak and strong, rich and poor, all pursued that single study, the Torah. The product of this prolonged study is that gigantic literature which, as a long unbroken chain of spiritual activity, connects together the various periods of the Jews' chequered and eventful history. All ages and all lands have contributed to the development of this supreme study. For under the word Torah was comprised not only the Law, but also the contributions of later times expressing either the thoughts or the emotions of holy and sincere men; and even their honest scepticism was not entirely excluded. As in the canon of the Bible, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon found place in the same volume that contains the Law and the Prophets, so at a later time people did not object to put the philosophical works of Maimonides and the songs of Judah Hallelevi on the same level with the Code of the Law compiled by R. Isaac Alfasi, and the commentaries on the Bible by R. Solomon b. Isaac.⁷ None of them was declared infallible, but also to none of them, as soon as people were convinced of the author's sincerity, was denied the homage due to seekers after truth. Almost every author was called Rabbi ("my master") or Rabbenu ("our master"),⁸ and nearly every book was regarded more or less as a contribution to the great bulk of the Torah. It was called Writ,⁹ and was treated with a certain kind of piety. But, by a series of accidents too long to be related here, sincerity ceased and sport took its place. I refer to the casuistic schools commonly known by the name of Pilpulists¹⁰ (the "seasoned" or the "sharp" ones), who flourished in the last two centuries preceding ours. To the authors of this unhappy period, a few glorious exceptions always allowed, the preceding

Jewish literature did not mean a "fountain of living waters," supplying men with truth and religious inspiration, but rather a kind of armoury providing them with juristic cases over which to fight, and to out-do each other in sophistry and subtlety. As a consequence they cared little or nothing for that part of the Jewish literature that appeals less to the intellect than to the feelings of men. In short, religion consisted only of complicated cases and innumerable ordinances, in which the wit of these men found delight. But the emotional part of it, whose root is the Faith and Love of men, was almost entirely neglected.

But it was precisely these higher religious emotions that were Baalshem's peculiar province, and it was to them that he assigned in his religious system a place befitting their importance and their dignity. And the locality where his ministration lay was curiously adapted for such propaganda. To that universal study of the Law of which I have just spoken there was one exception. That exception was amongst the Jews in the territories which bordered on the Carpathian Mountains, and comprise the principalities of Moldavia, and Wallachia, Bukovina, and the Ukraine.

It is historically certain that the first arrival of the Jews in Roumania was at a very early date, but there is no trace of any intellectual productivity among the immigrants until recent times, and it is admitted that the study of the Law was almost entirely neglected. It was in these districts of mental, and perhaps we might add of even spiritual, darkness that Chassidism took its rise and achieved its first success. "The sect of the Chassidim," says one of the bitterest but most trustworthy of their opponents, "first gained ground in the most uncivilised

provinces; in the wild ravines of Wallachia and the dreary steppes of the Ukraine."

Apart from the genius of its founder, Chassidism owed its rapid growth to the intellectual barrenness of these districts as compared with the intellectual fertility of the other regions where Jews most thickly congregated. The Roumanian Jews were to some extent under the jurisdiction of the Rabbis of Poland. Now the Poles were celebrated even in Germany for the elaboration of their casuistry. These over-subtle Rabbis, delighting in the quibbles of their sophistry, and reducing religion to an unending number of juristic calculations and all sorts of possibilities and impossibilities, were but too apt to forget the claims of feeling in their eager desire to question and to settle everything. They may have been satisfactory guides in matters spiritual to the men of their own stamp, but they were of no avail to their Roumanian brethren who failed to recognise religion in the garb of casuistry. It was, therefore, not surprising that a revolt against the excess of intellectualism should have sprung up and flourished in those districts where the inhabitants were constitutionally incapable of appreciating the delights of argument. The field was ready, and in the fulness of time came the sower in the person of Baalshem.

In the above estimate of the Polish Rabbis there undoubtedly lurks a touch of exaggeration. But it represents the view which the Chassidim took of their opponents. The whole life of Baalshem is a protest against the typical Rabbi thus conceived. The essential difference in the ideals of the two parties is perhaps best illustrated in those portions of their biographical literature where legend treads most closely upon the heels of fact.

The hero of Polish Rabbinic biography at five years of age can recite by heart the most difficult tractates of the Talmud; at eight he is the disciple of the most celebrated teacher of the time, and perplexes him by the penetrative subtlety of his questions; while at thirteen he appears before the world as a full-fledged Doctor of the Law.

The hero of the Chassidim has a totally different education, and his distinctive glory is of another kind. The legendary stories about Baalshem's youth tell us little of his proficiency in Talmudic studies; instead of sitting in the Beth Hammidrash with the folios of some casuistic treatise spread out before him, Baalshem passes his time singing hymns out of doors, or under the green trees of the forest with the children. Satan, however, says the Chassid, is more afraid of these innocent exercises than of all the controversies in the *Meheram Shiff*.¹¹ It was through external nature, the woods of his childhood, the hills and wild ravines of the Carpathians where he passed many of his maturer years, that Baalshem, according to his disciples, reached his spiritual confirmation. The Chassidic hero had no celebrated Rabbi for his master. He was his own teacher. If not self-taught, it was from angelic lips, or even the Divine voice itself, that he learned the higher knowledge. From the source whence the Torah flowed Baalshem received heavenly lore. His method of self-education, his ways of life, his choice of associates were all instances of revolt; not only did he teach a wholly different theory and practice, but he and his disciples seem to have missed no opportunity of denouncing the old teachers as misleading and ungodly. Among the many anecdotes illustrating this feature, it is told how once, on the evening before the great Day of Atonement,

Baalshem was noticed by his disciples to be, contrary to his usual custom, depressed and ill at ease. The whole subsequent day he passed in violent weeping and lamentations. At its close he once more resumed his wonted cheerfulness of manner. When asked for the explanation of his behaviour, he replied that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that heavy accusations were being made against the Jewish people, and a heavy punishment had been ordained upon them. The anger of heaven was caused by the Rabbis, whose sole occupation was to invent lying premisses and to draw from them false conclusions. All the truly wise Rabbis of the olden time (such as the Tannaim, the Amoraim¹² and their followers, whom Baalshem regarded as so many saints and prophets) had now stood forth as the accusers of their modern successors by whom their words were so grossly perverted from their original meaning. On this account Baalshem's tears had been shed, and his prayers as usual had been successful. The impending judgment was annulled. On another occasion, when he overheard the sounds of eager, loud discussion issuing from a Rabbinical college, Baalshem, closing his ears with his hands, declared that it was such disputants who delayed the redemption of Israel from captivity. Satan, he said, incites the Rabbis to study those portions of Jewish literature only on which they can whet the sharpness of their intellects, but from all writings of which the reading would promote piety and the fear of God he keeps them away. "Where there is much study," says a disciple of Baalshem, "there is little piety." "Jewish Devils"¹³ is one of the numerous polite epithets applied to the Rabbis by the friends of Baalshem. "Even the worst sinners are better than they; so blind are they in

the arrogance of their self-conceit that their very devotion to the Law becomes a vehicle for their sin." It will be found when we deal with the most positive side of Baalshem's teaching that this antagonism to the attitude and methods of the contemporary Rabbis is further emphasised, and it will readily be seen that his whole scheme of religion and of conduct in relation to God and man rendered this acknowledged hostility inevitable. In approaching this part of our subject it should be remembered that, as stated above, Baalshem himself wrote nothing. For a knowledge of his sayings we are therefore dependent on the reports of his friends and disciples. And it is not unfrequently necessary to supplement these by the teaching of his followers, whom we may suppose in large measure to have caught the spirit of their master. Unfortunately the original authorities are in a difficult Hebrew patois which often obscures the precise meaning of whole passages.

The originality of Baalshem's teaching has been frequently impugned, chiefly by the suggestion that he drew largely from the Zohar (Book of Brightness).¹⁴ This mystical book, "the Bible of the Cabbalists," whether we regard its subject-matter or its history and influence, is unique in literature. Its pretended author is Simeon ben Yochai, a great Rabbi of the second century, but the real writer is probably one Moses de Leon, a Spanish Jew, who lived eleven centuries later. The book is one of the most interesting literary forgeries, and is a marvellous mixture of good and evil. A passage of delicate religious fancy is succeeded by another of gross obscenity in illustration and suggestion; true piety and wild blasphemy are strangely mingled together. Baalshem undoubtedly had

studied the Zohar, and he even is reported to have said that the reading of the Zohar had enabled him to see into the whole universe of things. But, for all that, Baalshem was no copyist; and the Zohar, although it may have suggested a hint to him here and there, was not the source whence his inspiration was drawn.

Its attraction for Baalshem is sufficiently explained by the fantastic, imaginative, and emotional nature of its contents. It lent itself more easily than the older Rabbinical literature to new explanations unthought of by its author. But even the Talmud and its early commentaries became apocalyptic to the heroes of Chassidism. Nay, the driest and most legal disquisitions about *meum* and *tuum* could be translated into parables and allegories and symbols full of the most exalted meanings. Baalshem, like every other religious reformer, was partially the product of his age. The influences of the past, the history and literature of his own people, helped to make him what he was. But they do not rob him of his originality. He was a religious revivalist in the best sense; full of burning faith in his God and his cause; convinced utterly of the value of his work and the truth of his teaching.

Although there can be no real doubt of Baalshem's claim to originality, it should be borne in mind that his teaching is not only distinctively Jewish, but that for every part of it parallels and analogies could be found in the older Hebrew literature. Indeed it is not wonderful that in a literature, extending over 2000 years, of a people whose chief thoughts have been religion, and who have come in contact with so many external religious and philosophic influences, the germs can be dis-

covered of almost every conceivable system, and the outline of almost every imaginable doctrine.

The keynote of all Baalshem's teachings is the Omnipresence, or more strictly the Immanence, of God. This is the source from which flows naturally every article of his creed; the universality of the Divinity is the foundation of the entire Chassidic fabric. The idea of the constant living presence of God in all existence permeates the whole of Baalshem's scheme; it is insisted on in every relation; from it is deduced every important proposition and every rule in conduct of his school.

All created things and every product of human intelligence owe their being to God. All generation and all existence spring from the thought and will of God. It is incumbent upon man to believe that all things are pervaded by the divine life, and when he speaks he should remember that it is this divine life which is speaking through him. There is nothing which is void of God. If we imagine for a moment such a thing to be, it would instantly fall into nothingness. In every human thought God is present. If the thought be gross or evil, we should seek to raise and ennoble it by carrying it back to its origin. So, if a man be suddenly overwhelmed by the aspect of a beautiful woman, he should remember that this splendour of beauty is owing to the all-pervading emanation from the divine. When he remembers that the source of corporeal beauty is God, he will not be content to let his thought abide with the body when he can rise to the inward contemplation of the infinite soul of beauty, which is God. A disciple of Baalshem has said: Even as in the jewels

of his beloved the lover sees only the beauty of her he loves, so does the true lover of God see in all the appearances of this world, the vitalising and generative power of his divine master. If you do not see the world in the light of God you separate the creation from its Creator. He who does not fully believe in this universality of God's presence has never properly acknowledged God's Sovereignty, for he excludes God from an existing portion of the actual world. The word of God (to Baalshem, a synonym for God himself), which "is settled in heaven" and "established on earth," is still and always speaking, acting, and generating throughout heaven and earth in endless gradations and varieties. If the vitalising word were to cease, chaos would come again. The belief in a single creation after which the Master withdrew from his completed work, is erroneous and heretical. The vivifying power is never withdrawn from the world which it animates. Creation is continuous; an unending manifestation of the goodness of God. All things are an affluence from the two divine attributes of Power and Love, which express themselves in various images and reflections.

This is the doctrine of universality in Chassidism. God, the father of Israel, God the Merciful, God the All-powerful, the God of Love, not only created everything but is embodied in everything. The necessity of believing this doctrine is the cardinal Dogma. But as creation is continuous so also is revelation. This revelation is only to be grasped by faith. Faith, therefore, is more efficacious than learning. Thus it is that in times of persecution, the wise and the foolish, the sinner and the saint, are wont alike to give up their life for their faith. They who could

render no answer to the questions of the casuist are yet willing to die the most cruel of deaths rather than deny their faith in the One and Supreme God. Their strength to face danger and death is owing to that divine illumination of the soul which is more exalted than knowledge.

We should thus regard all things in the light of so many manifestations of the Divinity. God is present in all things; therefore there is good, actual or potential, in all things. It is our duty everywhere to seek out and to honour the good, and not to arrogate to ourselves the right to judge that which may seem to be evil. In thinking therefore of a fellow-man, we should above all things realise in him the presence of the spirit of good. Whence we have the Doctrine that each of us, while thinking humbly of himself, should always be ready to think well, and always slow to think evil, of another. This explains the Chassidic attitude towards erring humanity. Baalshem viewed human sin and infirmity in a very different light from that of the ordinary Rabbi. Ever conscious of the Divine side of Humanity, he vigorously combated the gratuitous assumption of sinfulness in man which was a fertile subject with contemporary preachers. They, among the Roumanian Jews as in other communities, delighted chiefly to dwell on the dark side of things, and found their favourite theme in elaborate descriptions of the infernal punishments that were awaiting the sinner after death. It is related how on one occasion Baalshem rebuked one of these. The preacher had been denouncing woe to an audience of whom he knew nothing whether for evil or for good. Baalshem, indignant at this indiscriminate abuse and conceited arrogation of the divine office of judgment, turned on him in the following words: "Woe

upon thee who darest to speak evil of Israel! Dost not know that every Jew, when he utters ever so short a prayer at the close of day, is performing a great work before which the angels in heaven bow down?" Great, as it would seem, was the value set by Baalshem upon the smallest evidence of the higher nature in man, and few there were, as he believed, who, if their spirit was not darkened by pride, did not now and again give proof of the divine stamp in which God had created them. No sin so separates us from God that we need despair of return. From every rung of the moral ladder, no matter how low, let man seek God. If he but fully believe that nothing is void of God, and that God is concealed in the midst of apparent ruin and degradation, he will not fear lest God be far from him. God is regained in a moment of repentance, for repentance "transcends the limits of space and time." And he who leads the sinner to repentance causes a divine joy; it is as though a king's son had been in captivity and were now brought back to his father's gaze.

Baalshem refused to regard any one as wholly irredeemable. His was an optimistic faith. God was to be praised in gladness by the dwellers in this glorious world. The true believer, recognising the reflection of God in every man, should hopefully strive, when that reflection was obscured by sin, to restore the likeness of God in man. The peculiar detestability of sin lies in this, that man rejects the earthly manifestations of the Divinity and pollutes them. One of Baalshem's disciples delighted in the saying that the most hardened sinners were not to be despaired of, but prayed for. None knows the heart of man, and none should judge his neighbour. Let him who burns with zeal for God's sake, exercise his zeal on him-

self, not others. Baalshem said, "Let no one think himself better than his neighbour, for all serve God; each according to the measure of understanding which God has given him."

From this position it is a natural step to Baalshem's view of prayer. He is reputed to have said that all the greatness he had achieved was the issue not of study but of prayer. But true prayer "must move," as Baalshem phrased it, "in the realms above," and not be concerned with affairs sublunary. Your prayer should not be taken up with your wishes and needs, but should be the means to bring you nigh to God. In prayer man must lay aside his own individuality, and not even be conscious of his existence; for if, when he prays, Self is not absolutely quiescent, the object of prayer is unattainable. Indeed it is only through God's grace that after true prayer man is yet alive; to such a point has the annihilation of self proceeded.

It may be necessary to caution the reader against ascribing to Baalshem any modern rationalistic notions on the subject of prayer. The power of prayer, in the old-fashioned sense, to produce an answer from God was never doubted by Baalshem for a moment. Baalshem's deity is not restricted towards any side by any philosophic considerations. All Baalshem meant was that any reference or regard to earthly requirements was unworthy and destructive of this communion of man with God. The wise man, says Baalshem, does not trouble the king with innumerable petitions about trifles. His desire is merely to gain admission into the king's presence and to speak with him without a go-between. To be with the king whom he loves so dearly is for him the highest good.

But his love for the king has its reward; for the king loves him.

It has already been implied that, with regard to our duty towards our fellow-man, we must not only honour him for the good, and abstain from judging the evil that may be in him, but must pray for him. Furthermore we must work for his spiritual and moral reclamation. In giving practical effect in his own life to this doctrine, Baalshem's conduct was in striking contrast to that of his contemporaries. He habitually consorted with outcasts and sinners, with the poor and uneducated of both sexes, whom the other teachers ignored. He thus won for his doctrines a way to the heart of the people by adapting his life and language to their understanding and sympathies. In illustration of this, as well as of his hatred of vanity and display, it is told how, on the occasion of his being accorded a public reception by the Jews on his arrival at Brody, instead of addressing to them in the conventional fashion some subtle discourse upon a Talmudical difficulty, he contented himself with conversing upon trivial topics in the local dialect with some of the less important persons in the crowd.

This incident is perhaps the more noteworthy because it occurred in Brody, which was at that time a seat of learning and Rabbinic culture,—a place where, for that very reason, Chassidism was never able to gain a foothold. It is probable enough that Baalshem in his visits to this town kept aloof from the learned and the wise, and sought to gather round him the neglected and humbler elements of Jewish society. It is well known that Baalshem consorted a good deal with the innkeepers of the district, who were held in very low repute among their brethren. The

following remark by one of his followers is very suggestive in this respect. Just as only superficial minds attach a certain holiness to special places, whilst with the deeper ones all places are alike holy, so that to them it makes no difference whether prayers be said in the synagogue or in the forest; so the latter believe that not only prophecies and visions come from heaven, but that every utterance of man, if properly understood, contains a message of God. Those who are absorbed in God will easily find the divine element in everything which they hear, even though the speaker himself be quite ignorant of it.

This line of conduct gave a fair opening for attack to his opponents, an opportunity of which they were not slow to avail themselves. Baalshem was pointed at as the associate of the lowest classes. They avenged themselves for his neglect of and hostility to the learned by imputing the worst motives to his indifference to appearances. He was accused of idling about the streets with disreputable characters, and one polemical treatise draws the vilest inferences from his apparent familiarity with women. To this charge Baalshem's conduct, innocent in itself, gave some colour; for his views and habits in relation to women marked a strong divergence from current customs. The position of women in contemporary circles was neither debased nor inevitably unhappy, but it was distinctly subordinate. Their education was almost entirely neglected, and their very existence was practically ignored. According to the Chassidic doctrine of Universality, woman was necessarily to be honoured. "All Jews," says one Chassid, "even the uneducated and the women, believe in God." Baalshem frequently associated

with women, assigning to them not only social equality, but a high degree of religious importance.

His own wife he revered as a saint; when she died he abandoned the hope of rising to heaven while yet alive, like Elijah of old, saying mournfully that undivided such translation might have happened, but for him alone it was impossible. Then again in a form of religion utilising so largely the emotions of Faith and Love there was a strong appeal to the female mind. The effect of this was soon evident, and Baalshem did not neglect to profit by it. Among the most devoted of his early adherents were women. One of them was the heroine of a favourite anecdote concerning Baalshem's work of Love and Rescue. It is related that in a certain village there dwelt a woman whose life was so disgraceful that her brothers at last determined to kill her. With this object they enticed her into a neighbouring wood, but guided by the Holy Spirit Baalshem intervened at the critical moment, and dissuading the men from their purpose rescued the sinner. The woman afterwards became a sort of Magdalen in the new community.

Above I have endeavoured to throw together in some order of sequence the doctrines and practical rules of conduct which Baalshem and his early disciples seem to have deduced from their central idea of the omnipresence of God. This was necessary in order to give a connected idea of their creed, but it is right to say that nowhere in Chassidic literature have these deductions been logically co-ordinated. Perhaps their solitary attempt to formulate and condense their distinctive views is confined to a statement of their idea of piety or service of God, and an examination of three cardinal virtues, Humility, Cheerfulness,

and Enthusiasm. What the Chassidim held as to true service brings into relief Baalshem's characteristic manner of regarding the Law.

By the service of God was generally understood a life which fulfilled the precepts of the written and oral law. Baalshem understood by it a certain attitude towards life as a whole. For, as God is realised in life, each activity of life when rightly conceived and executed is at once a manifestation and a service of the Divine. All things have been created for the glory and service of God. The smallest worm serves Him with all its power. Thus, while eating, drinking, sleeping, and the other ordinary functions of the body are regarded by the old Jewish moralists as mere means to an end, to Baalshem they are already a service of God in themselves. All pleasures are manifestations of God's attribute of love; and, so regarded, they are at once spiritualised and ennobled. Man should seek to reach a higher level of purity and holiness before partaking of food and drink, than even before the study of the Law. For when the Torah had once been given by God the whole world became instinct with its grace. He who speaks of worldly matters and religious matters as if they were separate and distinct, is a heretic.

Upon the continual and uninterrupted study of the Law, Baalshem lays but little stress. He accepted the ordinary belief that the Law (under which term are included not only the Pentateuch, but the whole Old Testament and the major portion of the old Rabbinic literature) was a revelation of God. But, as the world itself is equally a divine revelation, the Torah becomes little more than a part of a larger whole. To understand it aright one needs to penetrate to the inward reality — to the infi-

nite light which is revealed in it. We should study the Law not as we study a science for the sake of acquiring knowledge (he who studies it so has in truth been concerning himself with its mere outward form), but we should learn from it the true service of God. Thus the study of the law is no end in itself. It is studied because, as the word of God, God is more easily discerned and absorbed in this revelation of Him than in any other. The Torah is eternal, but its explanation is to be made by the spiritual leaders of Judaism. It is to be interpreted by them in accordance with the Attribute of the age. For he regarded the world as governed in every age by a different Attribute of God — one age by the Attribute of Love, another by that of Power, a third again, by Beauty, and so on — and the explanation of the Torah must be brought into agreement with it. The object of the whole Torah is that man should become a Torah himself. Every man being a Torah in himself, said a disciple of Baalshem, has got not only his Abraham and Moses, but also his Balaam and Haman: he should try to expel the Balaam and develop the Abraham within him. Every action of man should be a pure manifestation of God.

The reason why we should do what the Law commands is not to gain grace thereby in the eyes of God, but to learn how to love God and to be united to Him. The important thing is not how many separate injunctions are obeyed, but how and in what spirit we obey them. The object of fulfilling these various ordinances is to put oneself, as it were, on the same plane with God, and thus, in the ordinary phrase of the religious mystic, to become one with Him, or to be absorbed in Him. People should get to know, says Baalshem, what the unity of God really

means. To attain a part of this indivisible unity is to attain the whole. The Torah and all its ordinances are from God. If I therefore fulfil but one commandment in and through the love of God, it is as though I have fulfilled them all.

I have now briefly to refer to the three virtues to which the Chassidim assigned the highest place of honour. Of these the first is called in Hebrew "Shipluth,"¹⁵ and is best rendered by our word "Humility," but in Chassidic usage it includes the ideas of modesty, considerateness, and sympathy. The prominence given to these qualities is in sharp contrast to the faults of conceit, vanity, and self-satisfaction, against which Baalshem was never weary of protesting. He regarded these as the most seductive of all forms of sin. But a few minutes before his death he was heard to murmur, "O vanity, vanity! even in this hour of death thou darest to approach me with thy temptations: 'Bethink thee, Israel, what a grand funeral procession will be thine because thou hast been so wise and good.' O vanity, vanity! beshrew thee." "It should be indifferent to man," says the master, "whether he be praised or blamed, loved or hated, reputed to be the wisest of mankind or the greatest of fools. The test of the real service of God is that it leaves behind it the feeling of humility. If a man after prayer be conscious of the least pride or self-satisfaction, if he think, for instance, that he has earned a reward by the ardour of his spiritual exercises, then let him know that he has prayed not to God but to himself. And what is this but disguised idolatry? Before you can find God you must lose yourself." The Chassidim treated Shipluth from two sides: a negative side in thinking humbly of oneself, a positive in thinking

highly of one's neighbour, in other words the love for our fellow-man.

He who loves the father will also love his children. The true lover of God is also a lover of man. It is ignorance of one's own errors that makes one ready to see the errors of others. "There is no sphere in heaven where the soul remains a shorter time than in the sphere of merit, there is none where it abides longer than in the sphere of Love."

The second Cardinal Virtue is "Cheerfulness," in Hebrew "Simchah."¹⁶ Baalshem insisted on cheerfulness of heart as a necessary attitude for the due service of God. Once believe that you are really the servant and the child of God and how can you fall again into a gloomy condition of mind? Nor should the inevitable sins which we all must commit disturb our glad serenity of soul. For is not repentance ready at hand by which we may climb back to God? Every penitent thought is a voice of God. Man should detect that voice in all the evidence of his senses, in every sight and sound of external nature. It is through his want of faith in the universality of God's presence that he is deaf to these subtle influences and can read only the lessons which are inscribed in books.

The reader will be prepared to learn that Baalshem, taking this cheerful view of things, was opposed to every kind of asceticism. Judaism, or rather Israelitism, it is true, was not originally much of an ascetic religion. But there can be little doubt that in the course of history there came in many ascetic doctrines and practices, quite enough at least to encourage such tender souls the bent of whose minds lay in this direction. To one of these, a former disciple, Baalshem wrote: "I hear that you think yourself

compelled from religious motives to enter upon a course of fasts and penances. My soul is outraged at your determination. By the counsel of God I order you to abandon such dangerous practices, which are but the outcome of a disordered brain. Is it not written 'Thou shalt not hide thyself from thine own flesh?' Fast then no more than is prescribed. Follow my command and God shall be with you." On another occasion Baalshem was heard to observe that it is a machination of Satan to drive us into a condition of gloom and despondency in which the smallest error is regarded as a deadly sin. Satan's object is to keep us away from the true service of God, and God can only be truly served from a happy and confident disposition. Anxious scrupulosity in details is therefore to be avoided. It is the counsel of the Devil to persuade us that we never have done and shall never do our duty fully, and that moral progress is impossible. Such ideas beget melancholy and despair, which are of evil.

The third virtue is called in the Hebrew Chassidic literature "*Hithlahabuth*,"¹⁷ and is derived from a verb meaning "to kindle" or "set on fire." The substantive "*Hithlahabuth*," so far as I am aware, was first coined by Baalshem's followers. It is best rendered by our word "Enthusiasm." Every religious action, to be of any avail, must be done with enthusiasm. A mere mechanical and lifeless performance of an ordinance is valueless. A man is no step nearer the goal if he thinks, forsooth, that he has done his duty when he has gone through the whole round of laws in every section of the code. This essential enthusiasm is only begotten of Love. The service of fear, if not wholly useless, is yet necessarily accompanied by a certain repulsion and heaviness, which effectually

prevent the rush and ardour of enthusiasm. The inspiration of true service is its own end. There is no thought of this world, and there is none of the world to come. In the Talmud there is frequent reference to one Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah, an apostate from Judaism, who, when urged to repent, replied that repentance was useless, and that for this mournful belief he had direct divine authority. For he had been told by a voice from heaven that even though he repented he would be excluded from sharing the happiness of the world to come. Of him it was said by one of the Chassidim, "This man indeed missed a golden opportunity. How purely could he have served God, knowing that for his service there could never be a reward!"

From the conception of Enthusiasm springs the quality of mobility, suggesting spiritual progress, and commonly opposed by Baalshem and his followers to the dull religious stagnation of self-satisfied contemporaries. Man should not imagine himself to have attained the level of the righteous; let him rather regard himself as a penitent who should make progress every day. Always to remain on the same religious plane, merely repeating to-day the religious routine of yesterday, is not true service. There must be a daily advance in the knowledge and love of the Divine Master. Mere freedom from active sin is not sufficient; such negative virtue may be but another word for the chance absence of temptation. What boots it never to have committed a sin if sin lies concealed in the heart? It is only the uninterrupted communion with God which will raise and ennoble your thoughts and designs, and cause the roots of sin to die. The patriarch Abraham, without any command from God, fulfilled the whole Torah, because he perceived that the Law was the

life of all created things. In the Messianic age the law will no longer seem to man as something ordained for him from without; but the law will be within the hearts of men; it will seem natural and self-evident to them, because they will realise that God and life are manifested through the law.

Baalshem, who dealt largely in parable, has left the following, which we may fitly add to our somewhat inadequate presentation of his doctrine.

There was once a king who built himself a glorious palace. By means of magical illusion it seemed as if the palace were full of devious corridors and mazes, preventing the approach to the royal presence. But as there was much gold and silver heaped up in the entrance halls, most people were content to go no further, but take their fill of treasure. The king himself they did not notice. At last the king's intimate had compassion upon them and exclaimed to them, "All these walls and mazes which you see before you do not in truth exist at all. They are mere illusions. Push forward bravely, and you shall find no obstacle."

We must not interpret the parable to mean that Baalshem denied the reality or even the importance of the actual phenomenal world. The very contrary is the truth. The world is for him full of God, penetrated through and through by the divine, and therefore as real as God himself. It was quite in Baalshem's manner when one of his disciples declared that only fools could speak of the world as vanity or emptiness. "It is in truth a glorious world. We must only learn how rightly to make use of it. Call nothing common or profane: by God's presence all things are holy."

Above we have reviewed the essential doctrines of Baalshem and his immediate followers; we have now to see how they fared at the hands of the sect which he founded. This is a sad part of our task, for the subsequent history of Chassidism is almost entirely a record of decay. As formulated by its founder the new creed amounted to a genuine Reformation, pure and lofty in ideal. After his death unhappily it was rapidly corrupted and perverted. This was due almost exclusively to the dangerous and exaggerated development of a single point in his teaching. That point, the honour due to the divine in man, was relatively a minor article in the original creed. But the later Chassidism has given it a distorted and almost exclusive importance wholly out of proportion to the grander and more essential features of Baalshem's teaching, until the distinctive feature of the Chassidism of to-day is an almost idolatrous service of their living leaders. What little there is to say of the history of the sect after Baalshem's death would be unintelligible without some explanation of the origin and growth of this unfortunate perversion.

It has been explained that Baalshem laid but little stress upon the study of the Law or the observance of its precepts in themselves, but regarded them only as means to an end. The end is union with God. Man has to discover the presence of God in the Divine word and will. Now this mystical service of God, although perhaps sufficing to sensitive and enthusiastic natures, is scarcely plain or definite enough for ordinary men. Few can realise abstractions: and yet fewer can delight in them and find in their contemplation sufficient nurture for their religious needs. What then had Chassidism to offer to the ordinary major-

ity who could not recognise God in all the plenitude of His disguise? The want of something tangible whereon to fix the minds of the people, which has confronted the teachers of so many creeds, was also encountered by the Chassidim, and they unfortunately found their way out of the difficulty by relying on and developing their doctrine of man's position in the Universe. Man's ideal is to be a law himself; himself a clear and full manifestation of God. Now, not only is he God's servant and child, but in highest development he becomes himself a part of God, albeit in human shape, so that he may become wholly one with his divine Father. But if man may reach this highest level of holiness, he is virtually a kind of God-man, whom his fellow-men of lower levels perceive by reason of his manhood, but his essential office consists in raising them up to God by reason of his Divinity.

The few chosen spirits who through the successful persistency with which they have sought God in all things have become, though yet on earth, absorbed in Him, are known in Chassidic literature by the name of the "Zaddikim." The Hebrew word Zaddik¹⁸ means "just" or "righteous," and the term was probably chosen in conscious opposition to the title of Rabbinic heroes, "disciples of the wise." For the Zaddik is not so much the product of learning as of intuition: his final consummation is reached by a sudden and direct illumination from God. The Zaddik not only resembles Moses, but, in virtue of his long communion with the Divine, he is also the true child of God. He is, moreover, a vivifying power in creation, for he is the connecting bond between God and his creatures. He is the source of blessing and the fount of grace. Man must therefore learn to love the Zaddik,

so that through the Zaddik he may win God's grace. He who does not believe in the Zaddik is an apostate from God. Here then we have the fatal exaggeration to which I have alluded, and here its logical consequence. The step to man-worship is short.

This peculiar doctrine of the Intermediary soon became the distinguishing feature of Chassidism. By a Chassid was understood not a man who held such and such opinions in theology and religion, but a believer in the Zaddik, and one who sought to attain salvation through the worship of the Zaddik. Every other doctrine of Chassidism was rapidly pushed into the background and overlooked. Even the grand and fundamental doctrine of Omnipresence in the Creation was veiled by the special presence in the Zaddik. Chassidism became mere Zaddikism, and its subsequent history is identical with the downward development of that cult.

Whether Baalshem named his successor is doubtful. But the lead after his death was assumed by his disciple Beer of Mizriez. This man's conversion to Chassidism was an important event for the new community; his piety and learning were beyond dispute, and, whereas during Baalshem's life Chassidism had found its chief adherents among the lower classes of society, Beer managed to gather round him many of the most learned among his contemporaries. It was to these new and ardent disciples of Beer that the expansion of Chassidism was chiefly due. They came together from many quarters, and after Beer's death separated and preached the new doctrine far and wide. Many even went forth during the lifetime of their master, and at his command, to found fresh branches of the new sect. Like Beer himself, they directed their ef-

forts mainly to winning over the educated sections of the Jews. The elder men paid little heed to their word, but the youths, just fresh from their casuistic studies, which had sharpened their wits and starved their souls, lent a ready ear and an eager heart to the new doctrine. The uneducated were by no means excluded; to them Chassidism held out a deeper consolation and a grander hope than the current Rabbinism of the age; they therefore joined the young community in large numbers without any special effort being necessary to gain them over.

In their methods of Prayer the Chassidim most conspicuously differed from the older communities. Laying as they did supreme stress on the importance and efficacy of prayer, they soon found it necessary to secede from the existing synagogues and erect separate buildings for themselves. The usual salaried Reader "with the beautiful voice and empty head," who naturally regarded his function as a matter of business, was done away with and his place taken either by the Zaddik himself or by some other distinguished person in the community. The Chassidim also effected many changes in the liturgy. Instead of the German they adopted the Spanish ritual. They excised many prayers which, lacking the authority of antiquity, were cumbrous in form or objectionable in matter. They inserted new prayers and hymns of their own. They paid little regard to the prescribed hours at which public worship should be held. Prayer began when they had got themselves into the proper devotional frame of mind. Frequent ablutions, perusal of mystical writings, introspective meditation were the means by which they sought to gain the befitting mood. The prayers themselves were

accompanied by the usual phenomena of religious excitement. Some in the zeal of their devotion began to dance; others were rapt in a motionless ecstasy; some prayed aloud; others in solemn silence. They justified their abrogation of fixed hours for prayer by saying that you cannot order a child when to speak with its father: such restraint were fit only for slaves.

As a rule the larger number of the younger Chassidim were able to devote their whole time to religious exercises. It was the custom among the Jews in Eastern Europe for the young men to live at the expense of their own or their wives' parents, in order that they might give themselves up entirely to religious study. According to the old notions, this meant the study of the Talmud and its Commentaries; the Chassidim who cared little for the legal side of Jewish literature betook themselves to the literature of edification and mysticism. No small part of their time was taken up with endless conversations about the Zaddik, his piety, goodness, and self-sacrifice and the wonderful miracles which he had wrought. If a Zaddik was living in his own town, the youthful Chassid spent as many hours as he could in the Zaddik's company, in order to observe and study this embodied Torah as constantly as possible. Where no Zaddik was at hand, periodical pilgrimages were made to the town in which he lived, and endless were the tales which were afterwards repeated, to those who were obliged to stay at home, of the Zaddik's marvellous wisdom and extraordinary deeds. The last hours of the Sabbath day were looked upon as a special season of grace, and the Chassidim were therefore in the habit of collecting together in the waning of the Sabbath and celebrating the so-called "Supper of the Holy Queen."

The meal was accompanied by the usual conversations as well as by hymns and prayers.

The Chassidim were second to no other sect in their loyalty and affection for each other. No sacrifice for a brother Chassid was too great. They knew no difference of rich and poor, old and young, wise and ignorant; for they all, with one accord, worshipped one common ideal, the Zaddik, who in his exalted position was equally raised above them all. Before him all minor differences of rank disappeared. When a Chassid travelled, he had no scruple in asking for lodging or entertainment in the house of any Chassid who could afford to give them. If he was in money difficulties the purse of his host was at his disposal. If that was not sufficient, it was supplemented by a grant from the fund of the community. These gifts were not looked upon in the light of charity either by giver or receiver; they were made to the Zaddik, to whom all Chassidim alike were debtors. It sometimes even happened that a Zaddik said that the son of some rich merchant was to marry the daughter of a poor school-master, and both parties were equally delighted to fulfil the wish of their beloved chief.

It may easily be imagined that the innovations of the Chassidim provoked the wrath of the orthodox communities. But in their detestation of the Rabbis the Chassidim returned in full measure all the hatred they received. The Zaddik is the Moses of his age: the Rabbis its Korah and Abiram. Where the Chassidic party in any community gained the upper hand, the Rabbi was deposed and a Zaddik, if that was possible, elected in his place. The issue of these bitter attacks upon the old nobility of the Jewish race was a rigorous persecution. In many places

the Chassidim were excommunicated, in others their leaders were publicly scourged and put into the stocks. Their books were burnt and their synagogues forcibly closed. But persecution produced only the usual result of increasing the popularity and the numbers of the sect. The devotion of the Chassidim to each other and to their common cause was increased a hundred-fold by suffering. In one case a distinguished Zaddik was accused of treason, before the Russian authorities, and was thrown into prison. In Russia, however, the power of money is considerable, and on payment of a large ransom not only was the beloved Zaddik released but as an obvious consequence his reputation greatly profited: the day of his release was celebrated as a yearly festival, while his sufferings were regarded by his followers as a sin-offering that atoned for the iniquities of his age. From this time the government maintained a purely neutral attitude towards the new sect, and ere long the persecution by the orthodox ceased.

The cessation of persecution may possibly be accounted for by the fact that Chassidism as a secession soon ceased to be formidable. There were early divisions within the sect. Even Beer's disciples began to quarrel over theological differences and to found separate communities. When once the course of corruption and spiritual decay had begun, it was the interest of the false Zaddikim to accentuate these differences. Each Zaddik sought to have a whole little sect to himself, from which to draw an undivided revenue. And each deluded little sect as it arose boasted of the exclusive possession of the true Zaddik.

It must not be supposed that these strictures apply to the whole class of Zaddikim. The greater number of Baalshem's leading disciples as well as Beer's were beyond

question men of pure, unalloyed piety, who would have rejected with scorn any idea of making a trade of their sacred profession. Their motives and their zeal were alike ideal. Many gave up highly paid posts as Rabbis when they joined the new sect. Some emigrated to Palestine to lead a holy life on holy ground, others sought to become religious specialists, following out practically, although with some exaggeration, a favourite doctrine of the Founder, that he who observes but one commandment devotedly and lovingly, may reach the goal desired: the union with God. Thus one Zaddik made it his business never to tell the smallest falsehood, whatever the cost or the inconvenience of truth might be. It is related that the Russian Government, suspecting the Jews of his town of smuggling, consented to withdraw the charge if he declared his brethren innocent. Having no alternative but either to bring misfortune on his brethren or to tell an untruth, he prayed to God to save him from this dilemma by sending death upon him. And lo! when the officials came to fetch him before the law court they found him dead. Another, thinking that the commandment in Exodus xxiii. 3, relating to the help that should be given to a neighbour or enemy when "his ass is lying under its burden," was practically unobserved, devoted himself to its fulfilment. He was continually to be seen in the streets, helping one man to load his waggon, and another to drag his cart out of the mire. A third made the service of the oppressed his religious speciality. It is said that one day his wife, having had a quarrel with her maid, was setting out to the magistrate of the town to obtain satisfaction. Noticing that her husband was about to accompany her, she asked him whither he was bound. He replied, "to the magis-

trate." His wife declared that it was below his dignity to take any part in a quarrel with a servant. She could deal with the matter herself. The Zaddik replied, "That may be, but I intend to represent your maid, who when accused by my wife will find no one willing to take her part." And then, bursting into a passion of tears, he quoted Job xxxi. 13: "If I did despise the cause of my man-servant or of my maid-servant, when they contended with me, what shall I do when God riseth up?"

Several Zaddikim were learned men and thinkers of no ordinary kind. The works of Solomon Ladiar or of Mendel Witipsker, read with attention and without Western preconceptions, certainly give the impression of both originality and depth of thought. But most characteristic of all is the passionate yearning of authors such as these towards the Divine. The reader is astonished and moved by the intense sincerity and ardour of their longing after God. But, despite the adherence of these worthy men, the fate of Chassidism, as a regenerative force, was sealed from the day when Zaddikism replaced the original doctrines of the sect.

For, apart from the obvious theological considerations already suggested, there are two points of inherent weakness in the cult of the Zaddik which naturally doomed it to perversion and failure. The necessary qualifications for "Zaddikship" are wholly undefined. We hear a great deal about what a Zaddik actually is, but we hear very little about what he should be. The Zaddik has many virtues, but we are nowhere told what are his indispensable qualifications. Moreover, the Zaddik is a being who can be comprehended by the understanding as little as an angel, or as God Himself. He is realised by faith,

not conceived by thought. Hence there is no human test of a true Zaddik except the test of miracles; and every student of religious history knows the deceitful character of that test.

The second source of danger arose from the Chassidim holding it to be their sacred duty to provide for the Zaddik a life of comfort and ease. The Zaddik must pursue his divine avocations undisturbed by grosser cares. But what were the consequences? The Chassidim believed they could win the grace and blessing of the Zaddik by the richness and variety of their gifts. A Zaddik's career became a very profitable concern. The result of both defects was that not only was the opportunity given for every scheming charlatan to become a Zaddik, but inducements were offered to make the deception lucrative. Hence the anxiety of the false Zaddikim, already noticed, to found separate communities.

Among the Chassidim of to-day there is not one in ten thousand who has the faintest conception of those sublime ideas which inspired Baalshem and his immediate disciples. It is still the interest of the wretched ringleaders of a widely spread delusion to crush and keep down every trace of reflection and thought so that they may play at will with the conscience and purses of their adherents. The new scientific movement, inaugurated by such men as Krochmal, Zunz, and others who came under the influence of the German critical spirit, found in them its hottest and most fanatical opponents. That the cult of the Zaddikim has not led to still more disastrous consequences is solely due to the fact that the Chassidim in general have remained faithful to the Law. It is the Law, against the excessive study of which the original

Chassidim protested, that has put limits to the license of its modern false prophets.

Amid much that is bad, the Chassidim have preserved through the whole movement a warm heart, and an ardent, sincere faith. There is a certain openness of character and a ready friendliness about even the modern Chassidim which are very attractive. Religion is still to them a matter of life and death. Their faith is still real enough to satisfy the demands of a Luther, but it is diverted and wasted upon unworthy objects. If Chassidism is to be reformed, its worship must no longer be of man; it must be brought back again to the source of all Beauty, all Wisdom, and all Goodness; it must be restored to God.

II

NACHMAN KROCHMAL AND THE "PER- PLEXITIES OF THE TIME"

IN her good-natured panegyric of mediocrity which is known under the title of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, George Eliot remarked: "Let us hope that there is a saving ignorance."

Strange as this demand may sound, the wish of the great novelist to see her favoured mediocrities "saved," has been shared by the great majority of mankind. I know that I, at least, echo that desire with all my heart. And I am afraid that I am prompted by some rather selfish reasons. It would be somewhat hard, when one is born with small abilities, but a great desire for being saved, to be deprived of the hope held out by the author of *Adam Bede*.

But there are some, I am afraid, who are not satisfied with this dictum of George Eliot. They show a strong tendency to make salvation a monopoly of ignorance. This is a little too selfish. With all due respect to every form of ignorance, sacred as well as profane, we ought, I think, to believe that there is also such a thing as a saving knowledge. Nay, we might go even farther. There may be certain epochs in history when there is hardly any

other path to salvation than knowledge, and the deep search after truth.

We all know the words of the Psalmist, "The Lord preserveth the simple." But as there are periods in the life of the individual when naïveté has to give way to sagacity and reflection, so there are times in history at which Providence does not choose to leave men in simplicity. At such times doubts arise, as though of themselves; questions suddenly become open when they had been supposed solved for centuries; and the human mind is stirred by a sceptical breeze of which no man can tell whence it came. One may under those circumstances be indifferent, but one can be simple no more.

Even in such cases, however, man has no cause to despair. When our dearest beliefs are shaken by all kinds of doubts, Providence sends us also great thinkers, earnest lovers of truth, who devote their lives to enlightening our puzzled minds. Not that these men try to answer all the questions by which we feel perplexed. They endeavour to satisfy us, partly by showing that many of our difficulties are not difficulties at all, but merely arise from superficiality, and partly by proving that the great cause about which we feel so much anxiety does not exactly depend on the solution of the questions that are troubling us. They give to the things which are dearer to us than our life a fresh aspect, which enables us to remain attached to them with the same devotion and love as before. To speak again in the words of the Psalmist: "Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, and they are created, and Thou renewest the face of the earth."

This spirit that renews the face of things is what I understand by "saving knowledge." As men of that

saving knowledge we may regard Rabban Johanan ben Zaccai¹ and his disciples, who made it possible for Judaism to survive the destruction of the Temple, which some believed to involve the end of the religion. As such men we may look upon R. Saadiah Gaon and his followers, who worked at a time when Judaism was menaced in its inner life, namely in the tradition, by the attempts of the narrow-minded Caraites to convert it into a bookish religion.² Such men were Maimonides and his successors, who came to the aid of religion when it had got into dogmatic troubles by reason of its coming into contact with various philosophical systems. And in order to approach the subject of the present essay, I venture to say that a man of such saving knowledge was also Nachman Krochmal, who lived and laboured in the first half of the present century, when Judaism had been terribly shaken by the scepticism of Voltaire, and the platitudes of the so-called Mendelssohnian school.

Nachman Krochmal was born on the 17th of February in the year 1785. His father, Solomon Krochmal, was a merchant of Brody, a commercial frontier town in the north-east of Galicia in Austria. In his early years Solomon often used to visit Berlin for business purposes. He is said to have seen Mendelssohn there on one occasion, and to have learned greatly to revere the Jewish sage. And it is not unlikely that Nachman's subsequent admiration for Mendelssohn was partly due to his father's influence.

Solomon was a man of considerable wealth, and he, therefore, endeavoured to give his son the best possible education. But as a respectable member of a Polish community a hundred years ago, Solomon had to follow the

fashion adopted by his neighbours, and the best possible education consisted in affording the child an opportunity to study the Talmud and other Rabbinical works. All other languages and their literatures were sealed books to the child — a very absurd and regrettable fashion indeed. But let us not be too hard on Polish Jews. I have been told that there are countries on our globe where people have been driven by the force of fashion into the opposite extreme ; where, with few exceptions, they think that the Talmud, as well as the whole Hebrew literature, must needs be excluded from the programme of a gentleman's education.

Happily, or the reverse, Krochmal's childhood did not last long, for in the year 1798 we find that Nachman, a boy of fourteen, was already married to a Miss Haberman in Zolkiew. As a result of this foolish custom of marrying at so very early an age, Nachman was hardly ever a boy ; we have at once to deal with him as a man.

It was then customary in Poland, and perhaps is so still, for the father of the bride to provide for the support of the young couple for some years after their marriage. In order to reduce the expense of this arrangement, the bridegroom had to reside in the same house as his father-in-law. Thus we see Krochmal removing from Brody to Zolkiew, the native town of his wife. Here Krochmal lived in the house of her father for many years, entirely devoted to his studies ; and he certainly needed all his time for them. For he now began to expand the sphere of his education, to embrace subjects quite new to him. By his marriage Nachman seems to have gained a certain amount of independence, and the first use he made of it was to study the *Guide of the Perplexed*³ of Maimonides,

the *Commentaries* of Ibn Ezra on the Bible,⁴ and other more or less philosophical works written in the Hebrew language. His next step was to learn German; but, as his biographers inform us, he was not able to follow this course without undergoing many struggles, and overcoming many obstacles.

It would lead us too far to give a full account of the difficulties which the young scholar had to conquer while pursuing his new studies. They will be sufficiently characterised by the following extract from a Hebrew letter of his disciple, Solomon Leb Rapoport, who, writing in 1841 concerning his master and friend, remarks: "Consider this, ye inhabitants of Germany"—and, I may add, ye inhabitants of England—"and you will be astounded. It is easy for you to avoid being one-sided, and to study different sciences, for you possess many schools and teachers from every branch of learning. It is not so in Poland and Russia even at present, much less was it so forty years ago. There is no teacher, no guide, no supporter, for the Jew who desires any sort of improvement. The Jew who wishes to enter on a new path of learning has to prepare the road for himself. And when he has entered on it, his friend will come to him and ask, 'Is it true that you have got scientific books in your house? Mind you do not mention it to any one. There are enough bigots in the town to persecute you and all your family if they get scent of it.'" It was under these conditions that Krochmal pursued his studies, which were by no means few or easy, for he was not content with a knowledge of only the lighter portions of German literature. He soon began to read the works of Lessing, Mendelssohn, and more especially of Kant, who always

remained his favourite philosopher. In his later years he also became acquainted with the writings of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. But to the last he could not console himself for having missed the advantages of a systematic university education.

After having learned German, Krochmal proceeded to acquire a knowledge of Latin and French, and to read the best books written in those languages. To deepen his knowledge of Hebrew, he studied Arabic and Syraic, but we are unable to say how far he succeeded in mastering these languages. With these studies, which appear to have occupied our philosopher for an interval of ten years after his marriage, the first period of his life seems also to end. But the hard work of ten years did not pass over the delicate youth without undermining his health for ever. At the age of twenty-four, Krochmal fell sick of an illness which compelled him to interrupt his work. He was forced to go to Lemberg to consult the doctors of that town, and he had to remain there for a long time. And now began Krochmal's career as a teacher. For during his stay at Lemberg there gathered round him a band of young scholars whom Krochmal's fame had already reached. It is useless to enumerate the names of all these students. Among them figured Isaac Erter, Samson Bloch, A. Bodek, and many others. The most gifted of them was undoubtedly Rapoport, who afterwards became even more famous than his master Krochmal. It is not easy to define accurately the relation that subsisted between these two men. Graetz, in his history, calls Rapoport a disciple of Krochmal. Rapoport himself, in his memoir of Krochmal, describes the latter as a dear friend with whom he was wont to discuss literary topics.

Zunz does not mention Rapoport at all in his account of our author. It seems to me that this relation may be most aptly defined by the Talmudic term "Talmid-Chaber,"⁵ "disciple-colleague."

Indeed, Krochmal's whole method of teaching was rather that of a companion than of a professor. He gave no set lectures on particular subjects, but conveyed his instruction rather by means of suggestive conversations with his younger friends. His usual habit was to walk with his pupils in the neighbourhood of the town, and to try to influence their minds each in accordance with its bent. If any of his disciples showed an inclination for poetry, Krochmal sought to refine his taste by directing his attention to the best works in Hebrew and German literature. To another, whose fancy strayed into mysticism, he recommended the writings of Philo and Ibn Ezra, at the same time suggesting how the works of the latter should be interpreted. A third who, like Rapoport, was interested in historical researches, Krochmal instructed in the methods of critical inquiry.

There must have been some fascinating charm in Nachman's personality, which made him irresistible to all who came into contact with him. Rapoport has described his first interview with Krochmal. "It is more than thirty years since I first made his acquaintance, and beheld the glory of his presence. Though he was in weak health, still his soul was strong; and as soon as I conversed with him there came over me a spirit of judgment and knowledge. I felt almost transformed into another man." Elsewhere the same writer says: "Oh, how sweet to me were these walks with Krochmal — sweeter than all the pleasures of this world. I could never have enough

of his wisdom; with his every word he conveyed a new lesson."

After a lengthy stay at Lemberg, Krochmal partially, though not entirely, recovered from his severe illness; he remained weak and pale for the rest of his days. His antagonists, the Chassidim, believed him to be possessed by a demon who could find no better dwelling-place than in the person of this arch-heretic. Had it been in their power they would probably have dragged him to some exorcist for the purpose of driving out his German, French, Latin, and other symptoms of demoniacal heresy. Happily the orthodox were powerless to do this, so Krochmal was left unmolested, and was allowed to resume his walks and studies. It may be here remarked that Krochmal in general avoided giving the Chassidim any cause for reasonable complaint. Rapoport asserts that his master was "deeply religious and a strict observer of the law. He was zealously anxious to perform every ordinance, Biblical or Rabbinical." The only liberty that Krochmal claimed for himself and his disciples was the right to study what they thought best and in the way they thought best. When this liberty was attacked, he showed a firmness and resolution which would hardly have been expected from this quiet and gentle man. To one of his pupils, who made concessions to the Chassidim and their Zaddikim worship, Krochmal wrote: "Be firm in this matter unless you wish to earn the contempt of every honest man. One who is afraid of these people, and debases himself before them bears a mean soul that was born to slavery. The man that wishes to rise above the mob, with its confused notions and corrupt morality, must be courageous as a lion in conquering the obstacles that beset his path. Consideration

of what people will say, what bigots will whisper, what crafty enemies will scheme — questions such as these can have but one effect, — to darken the intellect and confuse the faculty of judgment."

So Krochmal continued his studies without interruption till 1814, when the death of his wife's mother brought his period of ease and comfort to an end. His father-in-law seems to have died some time before, and Krochmal was forced to seek his own living. He became a merchant, but it is to be regretted that he did not prove as successful a man of business as he was a man of letters. He found it a hard struggle to earn a living. But the severest trial which he had to undergo was the death of his wife in 1826. In a letter, dating from about this time, to a friend who had asked him for assistance in his philosophical inquiries, Krochmal wrote — "How can I help you now? I am already an old man; my head is gray, and my health is broken. In the last three years I have met with many misfortunes. My beloved wife died after a long illness. My daughter will soon leave me to get married, my elder son will depart to seek his livelihood, and I shall be left alone with only a child of ten years, the son of my old age. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: From whence shall my help come?"

Nachman was evidently in very low spirits at this time, but he was in too true a sense a philosopher to despair. He turned for comfort to his studies, and at this dark epoch of his life he first became acquainted with the Philosophy of Hegel, whose system he was wont to call the "Philosophy of Philosophies."

For the next ten years the works of Hegel and inquiries into Jewish history appear to have absorbed all the

leisure that his mercantile occupation left him. We shall presently see what the result of these studies was. No fresh subjects were undertaken by Krochmal in the last years of his life; he had already acquired a fund of knowledge vast enough to engage all his thoughts. There are, however, some remaining points in his private circumstances which it may not be uninteresting to mention.

Krochmal, as has been already related, was not prosperous in his business. Things went from bad to worse, and he was compelled in 1836 to seek a situation. "There ought to be literary men poor," some writer has maintained, "to show whether they are genuine or not." This test Krochmal successfully passed through. Even as a young man Nachman's strength of character was admired by his contemporaries not less than his rare learning. In his subsequent distress, he gave evidence of the truth of this judgment. Despite his poverty, his friends could not prevail upon him to accept the post of Rabbi in any Jewish community. "I am unwilling," he wrote to a friend, "to be the cause of dissensions in any Jewish congregation. I should prefer to die of hunger rather than become a Rabbi under present circumstances." He expressed his views on this subject even more decidedly on a later occasion when the Berlin congregation offered him the post of Chief Rabbi in that town. In a letter, conveying his refusal of this honourable office, he says: "I never thought of becoming the Conscience-counsellor (*Gewissensrath*) of men. My line of studies was not directed to that end, nor would it accord with my disposition and sentiments. The only post that I should care to accept would be that of teacher in the Jewish Theological Seminary, which, as I was informed, you were thinking of establishing in

Berlin." The plan to found such an institution was not realised till forty years later, and in the interval Nachman had to look for his living in other regions than Jewish theology. Being in poor circumstances, and as his children and friends had left him, he felt very lonely at Zolkiew. "Nobody cares for me here," he writes, "and I am equally indifferent." His one desire was to obtain a situation at Brody, possibly as book-keeper with a salary of some thirty pounds a year, on condition that he would be expected to devote only half the day to his business duties, thus securing for himself leisure for philosophical studies.

His terms were accepted, and he obtained the humble post he sought. He remained in Brody for the next two years, 1836-8, but at the end of 1838 he fell so dangerously ill that he could no longer resist the pressing request of his daughter to live with her at Tarnopol. She had urged him to take this step even previous to his removal to Brody, but he had declined on the plea that he preferred to live by the labour of his hands. Now, however, he yielded to her wish, and betook himself to Tarnopol, where for two years longer he lived affectionately tended by his children and respected by all who knew him. In May 1840, Krochmal's illness began to develop fatal symptoms, and he died in the arms of his daughter on the 31st of July (the first of Ab), at the age of fifty-five. As Zunz happily remarked: "This great man was born on the 7th of Adar, the birthday of Moses (according to Jewish tradition), and died on the first of Ab, the anniversary of the death of Aaron, the High Priest."

I have tried in the foregoing remarks to give a short sketch of our Rabbi's life according to the accounts of Zunz, Rapoport, and Letteris. There is one other point

to which I must allude, as it involves a consideration on which Letteris seems to lay much stress. This biographer appears to think that Krochmal was in his youth greatly influenced by the society in which he moved, consisting as it did of many learned and enlightened men. There is, too, the oft-quoted saying of Goethe:—

Wer den Dichter will verstehen
Muss in Dichters Lande gehen.

And I am probably expected to give some account of the state of society in which Nachman grew up. I regret that I must ask to be excused from doing so. I cannot consent to take the reader to Krochmal's land. And if I might venture to give him my humble advice, I should only say, "By all means stop at home." Goethe may be right about the poet, but his remark does not apply to the case of the scholar. It may be true, as some think, that every great man is the product of his time, but it certainly does not follow that he is the product of his country. Nor could I name any other country of which Krochmal was the product. Many a city no doubt boasted itself a town full of "*Chakhamim* and *Sopherim*"⁶ as the Hebrew phrase is, or, as we would express it, "a seat of learning," full of scholars of the ancient and modern schools. But neither these ancient scholars nor the modern were of a kind to produce a real scholar and an enlightened thinker like Krochmal. There were many men who knew by heart the whole of the Halachic works of Maimonides, the Mishnah, and even the whole of the Babylonian Talmud. This is very imposing. But if you look a little closer, you will find that with a few exceptions—such as the school of R. Elijah Wilna—these men, generally

speaking, hardly deserve the name of scholars at all. They were rather a sort of studying engines. The steam-engine passes over a continent, here through romantic scenery, there in the midst of arid deserts, by stream and mountain and valley, always with the same monotonous hum and shriek. So these scholars went through the Talmud with never changing feelings. They did not rejoice at the description which is given in tractate *Biccurim*⁷ of the procession formed when the first-fruits were brought into the Holy Temple. They were not much saddened when reading in tractate *Taanith*⁸ of the unhappy days so recurrent in Jewish history. They were not delighted by the wisdom of *Seder Nezikin*,⁹ which deals with civil law; nor were they vexed of *Seder Taha-roth*,¹⁰ which treats of the laws of cleanliness and uncleanness, that by their exaggeration gave cause to much dissension in the time of the Temple. The pre-Talmudic literature, such as the *Siphra*, *Siphre*, and *Mechilta*¹¹—the only existing means of obtaining an insight into the Talmud—were altogether neglected. All that these readers cared for was to push on to the end, and the prayer recited at the close was of more importance to them than the treatise they had perused.

Not less melancholy was the spectacle presented by the so-called men of "Enlightenment" (*Aufklärung*). They belonged chiefly to the rationalistic school of Mendelssohn, but they equalled their master neither in knowledge nor in moral character. It was an enlightenment without foundation in real scholarship, and did not lead to an ideal life, though again I must add that there were exceptions. These men were rather what Germans would term *Schön-geister*, a set of dilettanti who cared to study as little as

possible, and to write as much as possible. They wrote bad grammars, superficial commentaries on the Bible, and terribly dull poems. Of this literature, with the exception of Erter's *Watchman*,¹² there is scarcely a work that one would care to read twice. Most of them despised Rabbinism, but without understanding its noblest forms as they are to be traced in the Talmud and later Hebrew literature. They did not dislike Judaism, but the only Judaism they affected was one "which does not oppose itself to anything in particular"; or, as Heine would have described it, "Eine reinliche Religion." In one respect these little men were great: in mutual admiration, which reached such a pitch that such titles as "Great Luminary," "World-famed Sage," were considered altogether too insignificant and commonplace.

I will now pass to the writings of Krochmal. It must be premised that Krochmal was not a voluminous author. All his writings, including a few letters which were published in various Hebrew periodicals, would scarcely occupy four hundred pages. Krochmal used to call himself "der ewige Student" (the perpetual pupil). He did not read books, nor study philosophical systems, with the object of writing books of his own on them. He read and studied in order that he might become a better and a wiser man. Besides, he did not think himself competent to judge on grave subjects, nor did he consider his judgment, even if he formed one, worthy of publication. He counselled his friends to be equally slow in publishing their views to the world. "Be not," he wrote to a correspondent,— "be not hasty in forming your opinions before you have studied the literature of the subject with care and devotion. This is no easy matter, for no man can

obtain any real knowledge of the Torah and philosophy unless he is prepared to give himself up in single-hearted devotion to his studies." Severe though he was to his friends, he was still more severe to himself. Though he had been collecting materials on subjects of Jewish history and philosophy from his early youth, it was not until he had endured much persuasion and pressure from his friends that he began to write down his thoughts in a connected form. We thus possess only one work from the pen of this author; but that work is the *Guide of the Perplexed of the Time*,¹³ a posthumous book published in 1851, eleven years after Krochmal's death. His work had been much interrupted by illness during the last years of his life, and as a necessary consequence many parts of his treatise finally remained in an unfinished state. Krochmal commissioned his children to hand over his papers to Zunz, who was to arrange and edit them as best he might. Zunz, who in his reverence for Krochmal went so far as to call him the man of God, gladly accepted the task, in which he was aided by Steinschneider. Unfortunately, the work was published in Lemberg, a place famous for spoiling books. Even the skill of these two great masters did not suffice to save Krochmal's work from the fate to which all the books printed in Lemberg seem inevitably doomed. Thus Krochmal's work is printed on bad paper, and with faint ink; it is full of misprints and the text is sometimes confused with the notes. A second edition appeared in Lemberg in 1863; but, it is scarcely necessary to add, the reprint is even worse than the original issue.

The work occupies some 350 pages, and is divided into seventeen chapters. The opening six treat of Religion in general. The author first indicates the opposite dan-

gers to which men are liable. On the one hand, men are exposed to extravagant phantasy (*Schwärmerei*), superstition and ceremonialism (*Werkheiligkeit*). Some, on the other hand, in their endeavour to avoid this danger, fall into the opposite extreme, materialism, unbelief, and moral degeneracy as a consequence of their neglect of all law. He proceeds to say: Even in the ritual part of religion, such as the regulations of the Sabbath, the dietary laws and so forth, we find abstract definitions necessary, and differences of opinions prevalent. In the dogmatic aspects of religion, dealing as they do with the grave subjects of metaphysics, the mystery of life and death, the destiny of man, his relation to God, reward and punishment, the inner meaning of the laws,—in these spiritual matters, the difficulty of accurate definition must be far greater and the opportunities for difference of opinion more frequent and important. What guide are we to follow, seeing that every error involves the most dangerous consequences? Shall we abandon altogether the effort of thinking on these grave subjects? Such a course is impossible. Do not believe, says Krochmal, that there ever was a time when the religious man was entirely satisfied by deeds of righteousness, as some people maintain. On the contrary, every man, whether an independent thinker or a simple believer, always feels the weight of these questions upon him. Every man desires to have some ideal basis for his actions which must constitute his real life in its noblest moments. Krochmal here quotes a famous passage from the Midrash.¹⁴ The Torah, according to one of our ancient sages, may be compared to two paths, the one burning with fire, the other covered with snow. If a man enters on the

former path he will die by the heat; if he walks by the latter path he will be frozen by the snow. What, then, must he do? He must walk in the middle, or, as we should say, he must choose the golden mean. But, as Krochmal suggests, the middle way in historical and philosophical doubts does not consist, as some idle heads suppose, in a kind of compromise between two opposing views. If one of two contending parties declares that twice two make six, while his opponent asserts that twice two make eight, a sort of compromise might be arrived at by conceding that twice two make seven. But such a compromise would be as false as either extreme; and the seeker after the truth must revert to that mean which is the heart of all things, independently of all factions, placing himself above them.

Having dealt with the arguments relating to the existence of God as elaborated in the philosophical systems of his time, Krochmal leads up to his treatment of the History of Israel by a chapter on the ideal gifts bestowed upon the various ancient nations, which, possessed by them through many centuries, were lost when their nationality ceased. We next come, in Chapter VII., to the ideal gifts of Israel. These are the religious gift and the faculty and desire for seeking the ideal of all ideals, namely, God. But Israel, whose mission it was to propagate this ideal, was, even as other nations, subject to natural laws; and its history presents progress and reaction, rise and decline. Krochmal devotes his next three chapters to showing how, in the history of Israel, as in other histories, may be detected a triple process. These three stages are the budding, the period of maturity, and the decay. As the history of Israel is

more a history of religion than of politics and battles, its rise and decline correspond more or less with Israel's attachment to God, and its falling away from Him. The decay would be associated with the adoption of either of the extremes, the dangerous effects of which have been already mentioned. But "through progress and back-sliding, amid infectious contact with idolatry, amid survival of old growths of superstition, of the crude practices of the past; amid the solicitation of new aspects of life; in material prosperity and in material ruin," Israel was never wholly detached from God. In the worst times it had its judges or its prophets, its heroes or its sages, its Rabbis or its philosophers, who strove to bring Israel back to its mission, and who succeeded in their efforts to do so. Even in its decay traces of the Divine spirit made themselves felt, and revived the nation, which entered again on a triple course and repeated its three phases. The first of these three-fold epochs began, according to Krochmal's eighth chapter, with the times of the Patriarchs, and ended with the death of Gedaliah after the destruction of the first Temple. Next, in the following two chapters, Krochmal finds the second triple movement in the interval between the prophets of the exile in Babylon and the death of Bar-Cochba about 135 A.C. The author also hints at the existence of a third such epoch beginning with R. Judah the Patriarch, the compiler of the Mishnah (220 A.C.),¹⁵ and ending with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (1492). This idea is not further developed by Krochmal; but it would be interesting to ask, by the way, in which phase of the three-fold process — rise, maturity, or decay — are we at the present time?

The next five chapters may be regarded as an excursus on the preceding two. Krochmal discusses the Biblical books which belong to the period of the Exile and of the Second Temple, such as the Second Isaiah, certain Exilic and Maccabean psalms, Ecclesiastes, certain Apocryphal books, and the work of the Men of the Great Synagogue. They contain, again, researches on the various sects, such as the Assideans, Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, the Gnostics, the Cabbalists and their relation to the latter, and the Minim,¹⁶ who are mentioned in the Talmud. In another part of this excursus Krochmal describes the systems of the Alexandrian Jewish philosophers, such as Philo and Aristobulus, and discusses their relation to certain theosophic ideas in various Midrash-collections. The author also attempts to prove the necessity of Tradition; he shows its first traces in the Bible, and explains the term *Sopherim* (scribes); and he points out the meaning of the phrase "A law unto Moses from Mount Sinai,"¹⁷ and similar expressions. He gives a summary of the development of the Halachah in its different stages, the criteria by which the older Halachahs may be discriminated; he seeks to arrive at the origin of the Mishnah, and deals with various cognate topics. In another discourse Krochmal endeavours to explain the term *Agadah*,¹⁸ its origin and development; the different kinds of *Agadah* and their relative value. Chapter XVI. contains the Prolegomena to a philosophy of the Jewish religion in accordance with the principles laid down by Hegel. In the seventeenth and last chapter the author gives a general introduction to the Philosophy of Ibn Ezra, and quotes illustrative extracts.

The space of an essay does not permit me to give

further details of Krochmal's book. I am conscious that the preceding outline is deficient in quality as well as in quantity. Yet, even from this meagre abstract, the reader will gather that Krochmal reviews many of the great problems which concern religion in general and Judaism in particular. Zunz somewhere remarks that Krochmal was inspired in his work by the study of Hegel, just as Maimonides had been by the study of Aristotle. I give this statement solely on the authority of Zunz, as I myself have never made a study of the works of the German philosopher, and am therefore unable to express an opinion on the question.

Now there is no doubt that Krochmal's book is not without defects. The materials are not always well arranged, there is at times a want of proportion in the length at which the various points are treated, and the author occasionally seems to wander from the subject in hand. But we shall be better able to account for these and similar technical faults, as well as to appreciate the real value of the author's work, if we consider the following fact. Nachman Krochmal's object was to elaborate a philosophy of Jewish history, to trace the leading ideas that ran through it, and the ultimate causes that led to its various phases. But, unfortunately, at the time when Krochmal began to write, there did not exist a Jewish history at all. The labours of Zunz were conducted in an altogether different field. Not to mention the names of the younger scholars then unborn, Graetz, the author of the *History of the Jews*, and Weiss, who wrote a history of the Tradition, were still studying at college. Frankel's masterly essays on the Essenes and the Septuagint, his well-known work, *Introduction to the*

Mishnah, and the results of Geiger's most interesting and suggestive researches on the older and later Halachah, and on the Pharisees and Sadducees, had yet to be written. Rapoport's great treatise, *Erech Millin*,¹⁹ had not been published at that time, and Steinschneider was not yet working at his historical sketch of Jewish literature. It was not till six years after Krochmal's death (viz. in 1846) that Landauer's memorable studies on the Jewish mystics were given to the world. Even the bad books of Julius Fürst, such as his *History of the Canon*, and his still worse *History of Jewish Literature in Babylon*, were then unwritten. Neither the most charlatanic *History of the Opinions and Teachings of All the Jewish Sects*, by Peter Beer, the universal provider, nor Jost's most honest but narrow-minded and superficial *History of the Jews*, was of much use to Krochmal. Jost's more scholarly works were not published till long afterwards. Krochmal was thus without the guidance of those authorities to which we are now accustomed to turn for information. Excepting the aid that he derived from the writings of Azariah de Rossi,²⁰ Krochmal was therefore compelled to prosecute all the necessary research for himself; he had to establish the facts of Jewish history as well as to philosophise upon them. Hence, in the very midst of his philosophical analysis, the author was bound to introduce digressions on historical subjects, in order to justify as well as to form the basis of that analysis. He had to survey the ground and to collect the materials, besides constructing the plan of the edifice and working at its erection. Nevertheless, it is precisely for these historical excursions that Krochmal has deserved the gratitude of posterity. He it was who taught Jewish scholars how to

submit the ancient Rabbinic records to the test of criticism and the way in which they might be utilised for the purpose of historical studies; he it was who enabled them to trace the genesis of the tradition, and to watch the inner germination of that vast organism. He even indicated to them how they might continue to connect their own lives with it, how they might derive nourishment from it, and in their turn further its growth. I may assert with the utmost confidence that there is scarcely a single page in Krochmal's book that did not afterwards give birth to some essay or monograph or even elaborate treatise, though their authors were not always very careful about mentioning the source of their inspiration. Thus Krochmal justly deserves the honourable title assigned to him by one of our greatest historians, who terms him the Father of Jewish Science.

So far, I have been speaking of the importance of Krochmal's treatise and of its significance in the region of Jewish Science. It is necessary, I think, to add a few words with regard to the general tendency of his whole work. I have already alluded to the characteristic modesty of Krochmal; I have pointed out how little he cared for publicity, how dearly he loved retirement. The question accordingly presents itself—What can have been the real and sufficient causes that prevailed upon him to yield to the solicitations of his friends and to write upon what the Talmud would term "matters standing on the heights of the world"?

The answer to this question may, I think, be found in the title of Krochmal's book, the *Guide of the Perplexed of the Time*. It is indeed a rather unusual coincidence for the title of a Hebrew book to have any connection

with its subject matter. The same merit is possessed by the *Guide of the Perplexed* of Maimonides, the title of which undoubtedly suggested that of Krochmal's treatise. There is, however, one little addition in Krochmal's title that contains a most important lesson for us. I mean the words "of the Time." By these words Krochmal reminds us that, great as are the merits of the immortal work of Maimonides—and it would be difficult to exaggerate its value and importance—still it will no longer suffice for us. For, as Krochmal himself remarks, every time has its own perplexities, and therefore needs its own guide. In order to show that these words are no idle phrase, I shall endeavour to illustrate them by one example at least. In the *Guide of the Perplexed* of Maimonides, Part II., Chapter XXVI., occurs a passage which runs thus: "In the famous chapters known as the 'Chapters of R. Eliezer the Great,'²¹ I find R. Eliezer the Great saying something more extraordinary than I have ever seen in the utterances of any believer in the Law of Moses. I refer to the following passage: 'Whence were the heavens created? He (God) took part of the light of His garment, He stretched it like a cloth, and thus the heavens were extending continually, as it is said (Ps. civ. 2): He covereth Himself with light as with a garment, He stretcheth the heavens like a curtain. Whence was the earth created? He took of the snow under the throne of glory, and threw it; according to the words (in Job xxxvii. 6), He said to the snow be thou earth.' These are the words given there (in the 'Chapters of R. Eliezer the Great'), and I, in my surprise, ask, What was the belief of this sage? Did he think it impossible

that something be produced from nothing? . . . If the terms 'the light of His garment' and the 'snow of glory' mean something eternal (as matter) they *must* be rejected. . . . In short, it is a passage that greatly confuses the notions of all intelligent and religious persons. I am unable to explain it sufficiently."

So far Maimonides; and we are quite able to conceive his perplexity in dealing with this passage. On one side, Maimonides himself believed that Judaism is a dogmatic religion, and that one of its dogmas is the principle of *Creatio ex nihilo*. On the other side, he found R. Eliezer—one of the greatest authorities of the early part of the second century—apparently denying this dogma. The perplexity was indeed a serious one for Maimonides, but we find no difficulty whatever in extricating ourselves from it. In the first place, there are many who cling to the theory which holds that there are no dogmas in Judaism at all, and to them Maimonides' difficulty would have no relevance. Secondly, those who believe that there are dogmas in Judaism may regard such expressions as those quoted above from the "Chapters of R. Eliezer" in the light of mere poetical metaphors, or may call them fairy tales or legends, or include them in some other section of literature, known under the name of folklore, which is an excuse for every absurdity, the fortunate authors of which are responsible neither to philosophy nor to religion, and sometimes not even to common sense. But there is a third consideration that affords the best solution of the difficulty. The "Chapters of R. Eliezer," despite their pompous title, are not the work of R. Eliezer at all. Criticism has taught us to attach no importance to the heading of a chapter or the title-page of a book. We are

now in a position to judge from the tone, style, and contents of the work, that the "Chapters of R. Eliezer" is a later compilation of the eighth century, and that its author could not have been R. Eliezer, the teacher of R. Akiba, in the second century. In this way, these particular difficulties of Maimonides solve themselves for us in a sufficiently easy way. But it is just these solutions that open up new difficulties and perplexities which did not exist for the generation of the great Spanish philosopher. Suppose that we accept the view that Judaism is not a dogmatic religion. But how are we to conceive a religion without dogmas, or, if you prefer the expression, without principles or bases of belief? Or is Judaism, as some platitudinarians think, a mere national institute with some useful dietary and sanitary laws, but with nothing that makes for the sanctification of man, with no guidance to offer us in the great problems of our life, and in the greatest anxieties of the human soul? On the other hand, granted that we may consider certain things as mere legend, how are we to discriminate between these and the things that must be taken seriously? Does it depend on the nature of the subject, or on the position of the book in the canon of Hebrew literature? In the thirteenth century symbolical meanings were given to certain difficult passages in the Talmud; but the process was carried further, and the Biblical narratives were subjected by philosophers to a like treatment. R. Solomon ben Adereth and his colleagues (in the thirteenth century) settled the question by indiscriminately excommunicating all young men who should study philosophy; but this method is scarcely one to be commended for present use.

The third, or the philological solution of difficulties,

leads to fresh troubles. A hundred years ago men were in that happy state of mind in which they knew everything. They knew the exact author and date of every Psalm; they knew the author of each and every ancient Midrash; they knew the originator of every law and ordinance; they even knew the writer of the Zohar, and of other mystical books. There were certainly a few who did not know all these things, among them Ibn Ezra, Azariah de Rossi, and the two Delmedigos.²² But they were merely a miserable historical blunder, men who had no right to be born when they were. But the philological method has swept away all this knowingness as by a deluge from heaven, and men find that they know nothing. True, there linger on a few who still know all these things, but it is they who are now the anachronism. These, and such as these, are the perplexities of our time, to the resolution of which the labours of Krochmal and of a noble band of scholars have been directed in this century.

Have these perplexities, we must ask, and these puzzles been solved by Krochmal and his coadjutors? We may with all certainty answer: They have only pointed out the way, it is for ourselves to proceed by it. It would be unreasonable to expect that difficulties which have been accumulating during the course of thousands of years should be solved by the men of one or two generations. Again, we live in a century in which excavations and discoveries in other fields have added at once to our knowledge and to our uncertainty. Each country, we might almost say, over and above the perplexities that trouble mankind in general, has its own special difficulties which are entirely unknown to those who dwell outside its frontiers. I am not disposed to discuss these difficulties

in this place. Nor have I the ability to do so. But of two things I am perfectly certain: the first is, that for a solution of these difficulties which, in the language of Maimonides, "confuse the notions of all intelligent and religious persons," the only hope is in true knowledge and not in ignorance; and secondly, this knowledge can only be obtained by a combination of the utmost reverence for religion and the deepest devotion to truth. The poor old Rabbis who have been so foully decried by their calumniators as hedonists, and so foolishly praised by sorry apologists as materialistic optimists, strongly insisted that when a man woos the truth, his suit can only prosper if he is influenced by the purest and most single-hearted affection. "A man," says the Siphre, "must not say: 'I will study the Torah in order that I may attain the title of Rabbi or savant, or that I may become rich by it, or that I may be rewarded for it in the world to come.' He must study for love's sake." Such a knowledge, which is free from all taint of worldliness and of other-worldliness, a knowledge sought simply and solely for pure love of God, who is Truth, — such a knowledge is in the highest sense a saving knowledge, and Nachman Krochmal was in possession of it.

III

RABBI ELIJAH WILNA, GAON

THE three great stars of German literature are usually characterised by German scholars in the following way: Goethe they say represents the beautiful, Schiller the ideal, while Lessing represents truth. I think that we may apply the same characteristics to the three great luminaries, with which the Jewish middle ages ceased — for as Zunz somewhere remarked, the Jewish middle ages lasted till the beginning of the eighteenth century — and the modern age of Judaism opened. I am thinking of Mendelssohn in Germany, Israel Baalshem, the founder of the sect of the Chassidim in Podolia, and Elijah Wilna, or as he is more frequently called, the Gaon,¹ the Great One, in Lithuania.

As to Mendelssohn, enough, and perhaps more than enough, has already been written and spoken about his merits in awakening the sense for the beautiful and the harmonious which was almost entirely dormant among the Jews of his age. In regard to the second, namely, Israel Baalshem, I have only to refer the reader to the first essay in this volume. The subject of the present essay will be R. Elijah Wilna, who, among the Jews, as Lessing among the Germans, represented truth, both by his life and by his literary activity.

I say that the Gaon represented truth, but these words must be taken *cum grano salis*. For I do not mean at all to say that he was in possession of the whole truth, still less in *exclusive* possession of it. It is true as we shall learn in the course of this essay, that the Gaon was a genius of the first order. But there are matters of truth, the obtaining of which cannot be accomplished by genius alone. R. Elijah Wilna did not know any other language than Hebrew. Truths, therefore, which are only to be reached through the medium of other languages, remained a secret to him. Again, records of ancient times which are buried in the shelves of remote libraries or under the ruins of past civilisations are not always a matter of intuition. Even the most gifted of men have to wait patiently till these are brought to light by the aid of spade and shovel, or the pen of some obscure copyist. But R. Elijah lived at a time when excavation had as yet done very little for Semitic studies, and when a Jew scarcely got admittance into the great libraries of Europe. Thus much truth which we get now in a very easy way was beyond this seer's eye.

But even if all the libraries on earth had been at his disposal, even if he had read all the cuneiform writings which ornament the British Museum, and had deciphered all the Hieroglyphics which the Louvre possesses, even in that case we should not be justified in terming him a representative of the truth, without qualifying our words.

"Truth," said the old Rabbis, "is the Seal of the Holy One, praised be He." But Heaven has no Lord Chancellor. Neither men nor angels are trusted with the great Seal. They are only allowed to catch a glimpse of it, or rather to long after this glimpse. However, even the

longing and effort for this glimpse will bring man into communion with God, and make his life divine. And the life of the Gaon was, as we shall see, one long effort and unceasing longing after the truth.

Again, if I say that the Gaon represented truth, you must not think that he lacked the two other qualities. A life entirely devoted to such a great cause as that of seeking the truth is, *ipso facto*, ideal and harmonious. It is only in his influence on Judaism—more particularly on the Jews in the North of Europe—that this feature in his life becomes more prominent than his other admirable qualities.

In what this truth consisted, how the Gaon arrived at it, and by what means he conveyed it to others, we shall see in the course of this essay.

R. Elijah was born at Wilna in the year 1720. His father, Solomon Wilna, is called by his biographers the great Rabbi Solomon, and is said to have been the descendant of R. Moses Rivkas, the author of a learned work, containing notes to the Code of the Law by R. Joseph Caro.²

Having quoted the biographers, I must point out that there are only two biographies of the Gaon: the one by Finn, in his book *Faithful City*,³ on the celebrities of Wilna, the other by Nachman of Horodna, in his book *Ascension of Elijah*.⁴ The former is a very honest account of the Gaon's life, but a little too short. The latter is too long, or rather too much intermixed with that sort of absurd legend, the authors of which are incapable of marking the line which separates the monster from the hero.

Even in the region of imagination we must not for a moment forget the good advice given to us by one of our

greatest scholars who had to deal with a kindred subject: "He," says this scholar, "who banishes the thought of higher and lower from his study, degrades it into a mere means of gratifying his curiosity, and disqualifies it for the lofty task which it is called upon to perform for modern society." We shall thus cling to the higher and stop at the hero.

Our hero was the first-born of five brothers. They were all famous men in their little world. According to the tradition in Wilna, Elijah was a lovely child, with beautiful eyes, and goodly to look at, or as it is expressed in another place, "as beautiful as an angel!" The tradition, or rather the legend, relates that as a child of six years he was already the pupil of R. Moses Margalith, the famous author of a commentary on the Talmud of Jerusalem. At the age of seven years he is said to have already perplexed the Chief Rabbi of his native town by his controversial skill in Talmudical subjects. At the early age of nine he was acquainted with the contents of the Bible, the Mishnah, the Talmud and its ancient commentaries; and even the Cabbalistic works of R. Isaac Loria were no secret to the youthful scholar.⁵ At the age of twelve years he is said to have acquired the seven liberal arts, and to have puzzled the scholars of Wilna by his astronomical knowledge. At thirteen, when according to Jewish law he attained his majority, he was already the accomplished or "the great one" (Gaon); so far tradition. I am afraid that tradition is here, against all experience, too exact in its dates. But we may learn from it that the child Elijah showed many signs of the future Gaon, and was therefore considered as the prodigy of his age. Again it is likewise pretty certain that no man could boast of having been the

master of Elijah. He was not the product of any school, nor was he biassed by the many prejudices of his time. He was allowed to walk his own way in his struggle after truth.

It is rather an unfortunate thing that history is so much made up of parallels and contrasts that the historian or even the biographer cannot possibly point out the greatness of some men without touching, however slightly, on the smallness of others. It is only natural that every strong shining object should push the minor lights of its surroundings into the background and darken them. Thus, when we are speaking of the superiority of the Gaon, we cannot escape hinting at least at the shortcomings of his contemporaries, as well as of his predecessors.

To indicate briefly in what this superiority consisted, I will premise here a few words from a *Responsum* by one of his great predecessors, the Gaon Rabbi Hai.⁶ Consulted by a student as to the meaning of certain mystical passages in the tractate *Chagigah*,⁷ Rabbi Hai, in warning his correspondent not to expect from him a long philosophical dissertation, writes as follows: "Know that it never was our business to palliate matters and explain them in a way of which the author never could have thought. This is fashionable with other people, but our method is to explain the words of this or that authority in accordance with his own meaning. We do not pledge ourselves that this meaning is 'right rule' in itself, for there *do* exist statements made by the old authorities that cannot be accepted as norm." Thus far the words of the Gaon of the tenth century, which speak volumes. The Gaon of the eighteenth century followed the same course. All his

efforts were directed to this point; namely, to find out the true meaning of the Mishnah, the true meaning of the Gemara,⁸ the true meaning of the Gaonim, the true meaning of the great codifiers, and the true meaning of the commentators on the ancient Rabbinical literature. Whether this meaning would be acceptable to us mattered very little to him. His only object was to understand the words of his predecessors, and this he obtained, as we shall soon see, by the best critical means. This was the method of the Gaon; that of other scholars (at least of the great majority) was dictated by entirely different considerations. They would not suffer the idea that the great man could be wrong at times. To them, all that he said was "right rule." Now suppose a great author like Maimonides had overlooked an important passage in the Talmud or any other statement by a great authority, the alternative remaining to them was either to explain away the passage of the Talmud or to give the words of Maimonides a strange meaning. This led originally to the famous method of the *Pilpul* (casuistry), a kind of spiritual gymnastic, which R. Liva of Prague in the sixteenth century, and many others condemned as most pernicious to Judaism and leading to the decay of the study of the Torah.

Now it is beyond doubt that the method of the two Gaonim is the only right one. But, in justice to the casuistic school, which includes many a great name, it is only right to remember that this impartiality towards acknowledged authorities as maintained by our hero is not at all such an easy matter as we imagine. We quote often with great satisfaction the famous saying, *Amicus Plato, amicus Socrates, sed magis amica veritas*, "Plato is our

friend, so is Socrates, but Truth is, or rather ought to be, our greatest friend." This sounds very nicely, but let us only realise what difficulties it involves. To be a friend of Socrates or Plato means to know them, or in other words to have a thorough knowledge of the writings of the one and the recorded utterances of the other. But such a knowledge can with most men only be obtained by devoting one's *whole* life to the study of their works, so that there is not left much time for new friendships. And the few who are able to save a few years after long wanderings with these Greek philosophers, seldom see the necessity of new friendships. For what else did those long courtships of Plato or Aristotle mean except that those who conducted them thought that thereby they would wed Truth?

This impartiality is the more difficult when these friends are invested with a kind of religious authority where humility and submission are most important factors. The history of Lanfranc, the predecessor of Anselm of Canterbury, gives a striking example of what this submission meant in the Middle Ages. One day, we are told, when he was still an ordinary monk, he was reading at the table and pronounced a word as it ought to be pronounced, but not as seemed right to the person presiding, who bade him say it differently; "as if he had said *docēre*, with the middle syllable long, as is right, and the other had corrected it into *docĕre*, with the middle short, which is wrong; for that Prior was not a scholar. But the wise man, knowing that he owed obedience rather to Christ than to Donatus, the grammarian, gave up his pronunciation, and said what he was wrongly told to say; for to make a short syllable long, or a long one short, he knew

to be no deadly sin, but not to obey one set over him in God's behalf was no light transgression."⁹

But this admiration — and here we turn again to the Gaon — must not prevent us from believing that Providence is not confined to such ungrammatical Priors, and that the men who are really working on behalf of God are those who teach us to pronounce rightly, and to think rightly, and to take matters as they are, not as we desire them to be on account of our friends.

As for the critical means to which I have alluded, the Gaon himself said somewhere that simplicity is the best criterion of truth, and this is the most characteristic feature of all his literary career. The Gaon studied Hebrew grammar in order to obtain a clear notion of the language in which the Scriptures are written. He tried to attain to the knowledge of the Bible by reading the Bible itself; and was not satisfied to become acquainted with its contents from the numerous quotations which are made from it in Rabbinical literature. Again, he studied mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy, as far as they could be found in Hebrew books. Certainly the Gaon did not study these subjects for their own sake, and they were considered by him only as a means to the end, or as the phrase goes, as the "hand-maidens" of Theology, the queen of all sciences. But it may be looked upon as a mark of great progress in an age when Queen Theology had become rather sulky, continually finding fault with her hand-maidens, and stigmatising every attention paid to them as conducive to disloyalty. To these accusations the Gaon answered that Queen Theology does not study her own interests. Knowledge of all arts and sciences, the Gaon maintained, is necessary for the real

understanding of the Torah which embraces the whole of them. From his own writings it is evident that he himself was familiar with Euclid, and his *Ayil Meshulash* contains several original developments of Euclid. It was at his suggestion that a certain Baruch of Sclow translated Euclid into the Hebrew language.

Another way which led the Gaon to the discovery of many truths was his study of the pre-Talmudic literature, and of the Jerusalem Talmud. By some accident or other it came to pass that only the Babylonian Talmud was recognised as a guide *in the practices of religious life*. As the great teachers and their pupils cared more for satisfying the religious wants of their flocks than for theoretic researches, the consequence was that a most important part of the ancient Rabbinic literature was almost entirely neglected by them for many centuries. And it was certainly no exaggeration, when R. Elijah said that even the Gaonim and Maimonides, occupied as they were with the practical part of the law, did not pay sufficient attention to the Talmud of Jerusalem and the Tosephta.¹⁰ The Gaon was no official head of any Jewish community, and was but little troubled by decisions of questions which concern daily life. He was thus in a position to leave for a little while the Babylonian Talmud and to become acquainted with the guides of the guide. I refer to Siphra, Siphre, Mechilta, Tosephta, the Seder Olam,¹¹ the Minor Tractates,¹² and above all the Talmud of Jerusalem, which, regarded from an historical and critical point of view, is even of more importance than its Babylonian twin-brother. But by this means there came a new light upon the whole of ancient Rabbinic literature. The words of the Torah, the Midrash

says, are poor in one place, but we shall find them rich in another place. The Gaon by his acquaintance with the *whole* of the Torah had no difficulty whatever in discovering the rich places. If there was a difficult passage in this or that Tractate, he showed, by giving a reference to some other place, that it was wanting in some words or lines. Obscure passages in the Mishnah he tried to elucidate by parallel passages in the Tosephta. The too complicated controversies of the Babylonian Talmud he tried to explain by comparing them with the more ancient and more simple Talmud of Jerusalem.

There is little to be told of the Gaon's private affairs. Even the date of his marriage with a certain Miss Anna of Kaidon is not mentioned by his biographers. But it may be taken for granted that, in accordance with the custom in Poland, he married at a very early age, say about eighteen years. It was also when a young man that he travelled for some years through Poland and Germany. It is rather difficult to say what his object may have been in making these travels—for the Gaon was not the man to travel for pleasure's sake. Perhaps it was to become acquainted with the great Rabbis of these countries. It is also possible, as others maintain, that the Gaon considered the many privations which a traveller had to endure a hundred and fifty years ago, as an atonement for his imaginary sins. Indeed we find in many ascetic books that travelling, or as they term it "receiving upon oneself to be banished into the exile,"¹³ is recommended as a very successful substitute for penance. At least it seems that the coachmen whom the Gaon employed on his journeys looked at it from this point of view. One of them went so far in adding to

the privations of the Gaon as to run away with his carriage when the Rabbi alighted from it in order to read his prayers. But the reading of the Eighteen Benedictions¹⁴ must not be interrupted excepting in the case of danger; and the Gaon did not consider it very dangerous to be left without money and without luggage.

These travels ended in the year 1745. The Gaon left Wilna again at a later date with the purpose of going to Palestine and settling there. But he found so many obstacles on his way that he was soon compelled to give up his favourite plan and to return to his native town. It is not known whether he left Wilna again.

The position which the Gaon occupied in Wilna was, as already hinted, that of a private man. He could never be prevailed upon to accept the post of Rabbi or any other office in a Jewish community. I am unable to give the reason for his declining all the offers made to him in this direction. But it may be suggested here that it was in the time of the Gaon that there arose a bitter struggle between the Rabbi and the Jewish wardens of his native town, which ended in the abolition of the office of Rabbi. The history of the struggle is the more irritating, as it arose from the pettiest reasons imaginable. People actually discovered that there was no light in the house of the Rabbi after the middle of the night, which fact might lead to the conclusion that he did not study later than 12 o'clock P.M. What an idle man! And this idleness was the less pardonable in the eyes of the community, as the Rabbi's wife was so unfortunate as not to have been polite enough to some Mrs. Warden. Under such circumstances we must not wonder if the Gaon did not find it very desirable to meddle with congregational affairs in an

official capacity. The relation of the Gaon to his contemporaries resembles rather the position in the olden times of a Tanna or Amora,¹⁵ who neither enjoyed the title of Nasin or that of Ab Beth Din.¹⁶ Like R. Akiba, or Mar Samuel, the Gaon became influential among his contemporaries only by his teaching and his exemplary life.

It must be said in praise of the Jews of Wilna that, notwithstanding their petty behaviour towards their ecclesiastical chief, they willingly submitted to the authority of the Gaon (who was devoid of all official authority). They revered him as a saint. To converse with the Gaon was considered as a happy event in the life of a Jew in Wilna, to be of any use to him as the greatest distinction a man could attain on earth. But what is remarkable is the readiness with which even scholars acknowledged the authority of the Gaon. Scholars are usually more slow in recognising greatness than simple mortals. Every new luminary does not only outshine their minor lights and thus hurt their personal vanity, but it threatens also sometimes to obscure certain traditions which they wish to keep prominently in view. But the literary genius of the Gaon was too great to be opposed with success, and his piety and devotion to religion far above suspicion. Thus the Gaon was very soon recognised by his contemporaries as their master and guide; not only in literary questions, but also in matters of belief and conduct.

It would lead me too far to name here all the Gaon's disciples. It seems as if all the great scholars in his country considered themselves to be more or less his pupils. The Gaon used to give in the Beth Hammidrash, which he founded, public lectures on various subjects, and the students who attended these lectures also claimed the honour

of being called his pupils. I shall mention here only his greatest disciple, R. Chayim Walosin, who, after the Gaon, influenced his countrymen more than any other scholar of that time. This R. Chayim also did not occupy any official post among his brethren. He was a cloth manufacturer by profession, and was very prosperous in his business. But it did not prevent him from being devoted to Hebrew literature, and he enjoyed a wide-spread fame as a great scholar. But as soon as the fame of the Gaon reached him, he left cloth manufactory and scholarship behind, and went to Wilna to "learn Torah" from the mouth of the great master. It must be noticed that even the giving up of his claim to scholarship was no little sacrifice. All our learning, said some scholar in Wilna, disappeared as soon as we crossed the threshold of the Gaon's house. He made every disciple who came into close contact with him begin at the beginning. He taught them Hebrew grammar, Bible, Mishnah, and many other subjects, which were, as already mentioned, very often neglected by the Talmudists of that time. R. Chayim had also to go through all this course. Some would have considered such treatment a degradation. R. Chayim, however, became the more attached to his master for it.

In such a way the life of the Gaon was spent, studying by himself or teaching his pupils. It must be understood that to learn Torah meant for the Gaon more than mere brain work for the purpose of gaining knowledge. To him it was a kind of service to God. Contemporaries who watched him when he was studying the Torah observed that the effect wrought on the personality of the Gaon was the same as when he was praying. With every word his countenance flushed with joy; with every line he was gain-

ing strength for proceeding further. Only by looking at matters from this point of view shall we be able to understand the devotion and the love of the Gaon for study.

There has been, no doubt, among the Russian Jews a strong tendency to exaggerate the intellectual qualities of the Gaon. But one can readily excuse such a tendency. He was gifted by nature with such a wonderful memory that, having read a book once, he was able to recite it by heart for the rest of his life. Not less admirable was his sure grasp. The most complicated controversies in the Talmud, into which other scholars would require whole days and weeks to find their way, the Gaon was able to read by a glance at the pages. Already as a boy he is said to have gone through in a single night the tractates *Zebachim* and *Menachoth*,¹⁷ containing not less than two hundred and thirty pages, the contents of which are sometimes so difficult as to make even an aged scholar despair of understanding them. Again, he possessed so much common-sense that all the intellectual tricks of the casuistic schools did not exist for him. And nevertheless his biographers tell us that he was so much occupied by his studies, that he could not spare more than one hour and a half for sleep out of twenty-four hours. This is, no doubt, an exaggeration. But let us say five hours a day. He had not time to take his meals regularly. He used also, according to tradition, to repeat every chapter in the Bible, every passage in the Talmud, hundreds of times, even if they presented no difficulty at all. But it was, as already said, a matter of love for the Gaon; of love, not of passing affection.

Nothing on earth could be more despicable to the Gaon than amateurs who dabble with ancient literature. To

understand a thing clearly made him happy. He is said to have spent more than six months on a single Mishnah in the tractate *Kilayim*,¹⁸ and felt himself the happiest man when he succeeded in grasping its real meaning. Not to be able to go into the depth of a subject, to miss the truth embedded in a single passage, caused him the most bitter grief. A story told by his pupil, R. Chayim, may illustrate this fact. One Friday, narrates R. Chayim, the servant of the Gaon came to him with the message that his master wanted to see him as soon as possible. R. Chayim went instantly. When he came into the house, he found the Gaon lying in bed with a bandage on his head and looking very ill. The wife of the Gaon also reported to him that it was more than three days since her husband had taken any food, and that he had hardly enjoyed any sleep all this time. All this misery was caused by reason of not having been able to understand some difficult passages in the Talmud of Jerusalem. The Gaon now asked his disciples to resume with him their researches. Heaven, he said, might have mercy upon them and open their eyes, for it is written, "Two are better than one": and lo! Heaven did have mercy on them; they succeeded in getting the true meaning of the passage. The Gaon recovered instantly, and master and disciple had a very joyful Sabbath.

He is also reported to have said on one occasion, he would not like to have an angel for his teacher who would reveal to him all the mysteries of the Torah. Such a condition is only befitting the world to come, but in *this* world only things which are acquired by hard labour and great struggle are of any value. The German representative of truth expressed the same thought in other words, which

are well worth repeating here: "Did the Almighty," says Lessing, "holding in His right hand Truth and in His left Search after Truth, deign to tender me the one I might prefer, in all humility and without hesitation I should select Search after Truth."

This absorption of all his being in the study of the Torah may also, I think, account for the fact that his biographers have so little to say about the family of the Gaon. Of his wife, we know only that she died in the year 1783. Not much fuller is our knowledge about his children. The biographers speak of them as of the family "which the Lord has blessed," referring to his two sons, Rabbi Aryeh Leb and Rabbi Abraham, who were known as great scholars and very pious men. The latter one is best known by his edition of a collection of smaller Midrashim. Mention is also made of the Gaon's sons-in-law, especially one Rabbi Moses of Pinsk. But this is all, and we are told nothing either about their lives or their callings. From his famous letter which he sent to his family when on his way to Palestine, we see that he was rather what one may call a severe father. He bids his wife punish his children most severely for swearing, scolding, and speaking untruth. He also advises her to live as retired a life as possible. Retirement he considers as a condition *sine qua non* for a religious life. He even advises his daughter to read her prayers at home, for in the synagogue she may get envious of the finer dresses of her friends, which is a most terrible sin. The only tender feature in this letter is perhaps where he implores his wife to be kind to his mother on account of her being a widow, and it were a great sin to cause her the least annoyance. From other passages we may gather that his

family had at times to suffer hunger and cold by the excessive occupation of their father with the study of the Torah and other religious works. In short, the Gaon was a one-sided, severe ascetic, and would never have deserved the title of a good father, a good husband, an amiable man or any other appellation derived from those ordinary "household decencies" which, as Macaulay informs us, half of the tombstones claim for those who lie behind them. But I am very much afraid that many a great man who has made his mark in history could never claim these household virtues as his own. I do not want to enter here into the question whether Judaism be an ascetic religion or not. But even those who think Judaism identical with what is called "making the best of this life," will not dispute the fact that Jewish literature contains within it enough ascetic elements to justify the conduct of our greatest men whose lives were one long-continued self-denial and privation. "The Torah," says the Talmud, "cannot be obtained unless a man is prepared to give his life for it," or as the Talmud puts it, in another place, "if it be thy desire not to die, cease to live before thou diest." This was the principle by which the Gaon's life was actuated. And as he did not spare himself, he could not spare others. We could not expect him to act differently. The Scriptures tell us: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." But how is it with the man who never loved himself, who never gave a thought to himself, who never lived for himself, but only for what he considered to be his duty and his mission from God on earth? Such a man we cannot expect to spend his time on coaxing and caressing us. As to the charge of one-sidedness at which I have hinted, if the giving up of everything else for the

purpose of devoting oneself to a scholarly and saintly life is one-sidedness, the Gaon must certainly bear this charge ; but in a world where there are so many on the other side, we ought, I think, to be only too grateful to Providence for sending us from time to time great and strong one-sided men, who, by their counterbalancing influence, bring God's spoilt world to a certain equilibrium again. To appease my more tender readers, I should like only to say that there is no occasion at all for pitying Mrs. Gaon. It would be a miserable world indeed if a good digestion and stupidity were, as a certain author maintained, the only conditions of happiness. Saints are happy in their sufferings, and noble souls find their happiness in sacrificing themselves for these sufferers.

Another severe feature in the life of the Gaon showed itself in his dispute with the Chassidim. I regret not to be able to enter here even into a brief account of the history of this struggle. I shall only take leave to say that I am afraid each party was right, the Gaon as well as the Chassidim ; the latter, in attacking the Rabbis of their time, who mostly belonged to the casuistic schools, and in their intellectual pursuits almost entirely neglected the emotional side of religion ; but none the less was the Gaon right in opposing a system which, as I have shown above, involved the danger of leading to a worship of men.

Excepting this incident, the Gaon never meddled with public affairs. He lived in retirement, always occupied with his own education and that of his disciples and friends. It is most remarkable that, in spite of his hard work and the many privations he had to endure, he enjoyed good health almost all his life. He never con-

sulted a doctor. It was not until the year 1791, in the seventieth year of his life, that he began to feel the decline of his health. But he was not much interrupted by the failure of his powers. As a means of recovery, he esteemed very highly the conversation of the preacher Jacob of Dubna, better known as the Dubna Maggid,¹⁹ whose parables and sallies of wit the Gaon used to enjoy very much. On the eve of the Day of Atonement in the year 1797, he fell very ill and gave his blessing to his children. He died on the third day of the Feast of Tabernacles, with the branch of the Lulab²⁰ in his hands. The Feast of Joy, relates a contemporary, was turned into days of mourning. In all the streets of Wilna were heard only lamenting and crying voices. The funeral orations delivered on this occasion in Wilna, as well as in other Jewish communities, would form a small library. His disciples wept for their master, the people of Wilna for the ornament of their native town, and the feeling of the Jews in general was that "the Ark of God was taken away."

After the foregoing sketch, the reader will hardly expect me to give an account of the Gaon's literary productions. The results of so long a life and such powers of mind devoted to one cause with such zeal and fervour, would furnish by themselves the subject of a whole series of essays. The tombstone set on his grave by his pious admirers bears the inscription, "The Gaon gave heed and sought and set in order" — that is to say, he wrote commentaries or notes on — "the Bible, the Mishnah, both Talmuds, the Siphre, Siphra, the Zohar, and many other works." Inscriptions on tombstones are proverbial for exaggeration, and we all know the saying, "as mendacious as an epitaph." But a glance at the catalogue of the

British Museum under the heading of Elijah Wilna, will show that this inscription makes a praiseworthy exception. We will find that this list might be lengthened by many other works of great importance for Jewish life and thought. His commentary to the Code of R. Joseph Caro, in which one will find that in many cases he knew the sources of the religious customs and usages, put together in this work, better than its compiler himself, would have been sufficient to place him at the head of Halachic scholarship, whilst his notes and textual emendations to the Tosephta and Seder Olam, to the restoration of which he contributed so much, would have sufficed to establish his fame as a critic of the first order. And this is the more astonishing when we consider that all this was done without manuscripts or any other aid, and by mere intuition. We cannot wonder that scholars who had the opportunity of visiting great libraries and saw how the emendations of the Gaon agreed sometimes with the readings given in the best manuscripts exclaimed very often: "Only by inspiration could he have found out these secrets." We have no need to go so far; we shall simply say with the Talmud, "The powers of the real sage surpass those of the prophet." Nay, even had we possessed only his *Gleanings*, which form a kind of *obiter dicta* on various topics of Jewish literature, the Gaon would have remained a model of clear thinking and real ingenuity for all future generations.

However, a real appreciation of the Gaon's greatness as a scholar would only be possible either by a thorough study of his works, to which I have alluded, or by giving many specimens of them. The short space I am limited to makes such an undertaking impossible. I shall there-

fore use what remains to me to say a few words on the salutary influence the Gaon had on his countrymen, the Russian Jews.

The Russian Jew is still a riddle to us. We know this strange being only from the Reports of the Board of Guardians or from bombastic phrases in public speeches; for he has always been the victim of platform orators,

So over violent or over civil,
That every man with them is God or Devil.

From all, however, that I can gather from the best Jewish writers in Russia, I can only judge that the Russian Jew, when transplanted to a foreign soil, where he is cut off from the past and uncertain of his future, is for the time at least in a position in which his true character cannot be truly estimated. His real life is to be sought in his own country. There, amidst his friends and kinsmen who are all animated by the same ideals, attached to the same traditions, and proud of the same religious and charitable institutions, everything is full of life and meaning to him. Thus, a certain Russian writer addresses his younger colleagues who find so much fault with the bygone world: "Go and see how rich we always were in excellent men. In every town and every village you would find scholars, saints, and philanthropists. Their merits could sustain worlds, and each of them was an ornament of Israel." And he proceeds to give dozens of names of such excellent men, who are not all indeed known to us, but with whom the Russian Jew connects many noble and pious reminiscences of real greatness and heroic self-denial, and of whom he is justly proud.

The focus, however, of all this spiritual life is the *Yeshibah* (Talmudical College)²¹ in Walosin. I hope that a glance at its history and constitution will not be found uninteresting. The intellectual originator of this institution which bears the name *Yeshibah Ets Chayim* (Tree of Life College),²² was the Gaon himself. Being convinced that the study of the Torah is the very life of Judaism, but that this study must be conducted in a scientific, not in a scholastic way, he bade his chief disciple, the R. Chayim already mentioned, to found a college in which Rabbinical literature should be taught according to his own true method. It would seem that, as long as the Gaon was alive, R. Chayim preferred to be a pupil rather than a teacher. When, however, the Gaon died, R. Chayim did not rest till he had carried out the command of his master, and in the year 1803 the College was opened in Walosin. The cloth manufacturer and disciple now became Rabbi and master. He began on a small scale, teaching at first only a few pupils. But even for the sustenance of a small number he had not sufficient means, and his pious wife sold her jewellery to help him in accomplishing his favourite plan. This is the best refutation of the French proverb *Avare comme une Rabbine*. The number, however, increased daily, and before he died (1828), he was fortunate enough to lecture to a hundred students. The number of students in the year 1888 amounted to 400, and the Russian Jews are thus right in asserting that they have the greatest Talmudical College in the world. It is evident that no private charity by a single man, however great, could suffice to maintain such large numbers. Thus R. Chayim was already compelled to appeal to the liberality of his Russian brethren. The name of R. Chayim, and

the still greater name of his master, were recommendation enough, and besides private offerings, many communities promised large sums towards supporting the students in Walosin. From time to time also messengers are sent out by the committee to promote the interests of the Yeshibah. The writers to whom I owe these data tell us that these messengers travel to all parts of the world to collect offerings for Walosin: so that it is a standing joke with the students that the existence of the mythical river Sambatyon²³ may be questioned after all, otherwise it must long have been discovered by these messengers who explore the whole world in their journeys. But it would seem that this world is only a very small one. For the whole income of the Yeshibah has never exceeded the sum of about £1800. Of this a certain part is spent in providing the salaries of the teaching staff and proctors, and on the repairs of the building; whilst the rest is distributed amongst the students. Considering that no scholarship exceeds £13—it is only the forty immortals of Walosin who receive such high stipends—considering again that the great majority of the students belong to the poorer classes and thus receive no remittance from their parents, we may be sure that the words of the Talmud: “This is the way to study the Torah; eat bread and salt, drink water by measure, sleep on the earth, and live a life of care,” are carried out by them literally. But it would seem that the less they eat and the less they sleep, the more they work. Indeed the industry and the enthusiasm of these Bachurim (*alumni*)²⁴ in the study of the Torah is almost unsurpassable. The official hours alone extend from nine in the morning until ten in the evening, while many of the students volunteer to continue their

studies till the middle of the night, or to begin the day at three in the morning.

As to the subject of these studies, it is confined, as may be imagined, to the exploration of the old Rabbinic literature in all its branches. But it would be a mistake to think that the modern spirit has left Walosin quite untouched. It would be impossible that among 400 thinking heads there should not be a few who are interested in mathematics, others again in philosophy or history, while yet others would conjugate the irregular verbs of some classical language when moving to and fro over their Talmud folios and pretending to "*learn*." Indeed, almost all the writers who demand that these subjects should be introduced as obligatory into the programme of Walosin, belonged themselves to this Yeshibah. And it is these writers who betray the secret how secular knowledge is now invading the precincts of Walosin, as well as of other Talmudical Colleges in spite of all obstacles and prohibitions. In conquering these difficulties seem to consist the pleasures of life of many Bachurim at Walosin. Look only at that undergraduate, how, after a heavy day's work he is standing there in the street reading Buckle's *History of Civilization* in the moonlight! Poor man, he is not so romantic as to prefer the moonlight to a cheerful, warm room, with the more prosaic light of a candle, but he has got tired of knocking at the door, for his landlady, to whom he has neglected to pay rent for the last three terms, made up her mind to let him freeze to-night. But still more cruel to him is his fellow-sufferer, who is also wandering in the streets with an overloaded brain and empty stomach; he roughly shakes him out of his dreams by telling him that Buckle is long ago antiquated, and that he had better

study the works of Herbert Spencer, who has spoken the last word on every vital subject in the world. Still these two starving and freezing representatives of English thought in Walosin form only an exception. The general favourites are the representatives of Jewish thought. That such books as the *Guide of the Perplexed*, by Maimonides, the *Metaphysical Researches* of Levi b. Gershom,²⁵ and other philosophical works of the Spanish school are read by the Walosin students it is needless to say. These books now form a part of the Rabbinic literature, and it would be almost unorthodox to suspect their readers. But is worth noticing that even the productions of the modern historico-critical school, such as the works of Zunz, Frankel, Graetz, Weiss, are very popular with the Bachurim, being much read and discussed by them.

Thus Walosin deserves rightly to be considered as the centre of Jewish thought in Russia, in which the spirit of the Gaon is still working.

I have very often, however, heard doubts expressed as to the continuance of this spirit when, as it is to be hoped, better times come for the Jews in Russia. Is it not to be feared that liberty and emancipation will render untenable ideas and notions which arose under entirely different circumstances? There is no need of entertaining such fears. Rabbi Jedaiah of Bedres²⁶ concludes his philosophical work *Examination of the World*, with the following words: "The conclusion of the whole matter is, go either to the right, my heart, or go to the left, but believe all that R. Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides) has believed, the last of the Gaonim by time, but the first in rank." About five hundred years have passed away since these lines were written. Time, as we have seen, has brought another

Gaon, and probably Time will favour us in future with still another. But times have also altered. The rebellious hearts of a liberal age are not likely to obey always the command, "believe all that the Gaon said." But the heart of man will in all ages retain idealism enough to love and revere the greatest of men and to follow what was best in them.

IV

NACHMANIDES¹

R. CHAYIM VITAL, in his *Book of the Transmigrations of Souls*, gives the following bold characteristic of the two great teachers of Judaism, Maimonides and Nachmanides. Their souls both sprang forth from the head of Adam — it is a favourite idea of the Cabbalists to evolve the whole of ideal humanity from the archetype Adam — but the former, Maimonides, had his genius placed on the left curl of Adam, which is all judgment and severity, whilst that of the latter, Nachmanides, had its place on the right curl, which represents rather mercy and tenderness.

I start from these words in order to avoid disappointment. For Nachmanides was a great Talmudist, a great Bible student, a great philosopher, a great controversialist, and, perhaps, also a great physician; in one word, great in every respect, possessed of all the culture of his age. But, as I have already indicated by the passage quoted by way of introduction, it is not of Nachmanides in any of these excellent qualities that I wish to write here. For these aspects of his life and mind I must refer the reader to the works of Graetz, Weiss, Steinschneider, Perles, and others. I shall mostly confine myself to those features and peculiarities in his career and works which will illustrate Nachmanides the tender and compassionate, the

Nachmanides who represented Judaism from the side of emotion and feeling, as Maimonides did from the side of reason and logic.

R. Moses ben Nachman, or Bonastruc de Portas, as he was called by his fellow-countrymen, or Nachmanides, as he is commonly called now, was born in Gerona about the year 1195. Gerona is a little town in the province of Catalonia in Spain. But though in Spain, Gerona was not distinguished for its philosophers or poets like Granada, Barcelona, or Toledo. Situated as it was in the North of Spain, Gerona was under the influence of Franco-Jewish sympathies, and thus its boast lay in the great Talmudists that it produced. I shall only mention the name of R. Zerahiah Hallevi Gerundi—so-called after his native place—whose strictures on the Code of R. Isaac Alfasi, which he began as a youth of nineteen years, will always remain a marvel of critical insight and independent research. Nachmanides is supposed by some authors to have been a descendant of R. Isaac ben Reuben of Barcelona, whose hymns are still to be found in certain rituals. The evidence for this is insufficient, but we know that he was a cousin of R. Jonah Gerundi, not less famous for his Talmudic learning than for his saintliness and piety. Nachmanides thus belonged to the best Jewish families of Gerona. Various great men are mentioned as his teachers, but we have certainty only about two, namely R. Judah ben Yakar, the commentator of the prayers, and R. Meir ben Nathan of Trinqueta. The mystic, R. Ezra (or Azriel), is indeed alleged to have been his instructor in the Cabbalah, and this is not impossible, as he also was an inhabitant of Gerona; but it is more probable that Nachmanides was initiated into the Cabbalah by

the R. Judah just mentioned, who also belonged to the mystical school.

Whoever his masters were, they must have been well satisfied with their promising pupil, for he undertook, at the age of fifteen, to write supplements to the Code of R. Isaac Alfasi. Nor was it at a much later date that he began to compose his work, *The Wars of the Lord*, in which he defends this great codifier against the strictures of R. Zerariah, to which we have referred above. I shall in the course of this essay have further occasion to speak of this latter work; for the present we will follow the career of its author.

Concerning the private life of Nachmanides very little has come down to us. We only know that he had a family of sons and daughters. He was not spared the greatest grief that can befall a father, for he lost a son; it was on the day of the New Year.² On the other hand, it must have been a great source of joy to him when he married his son Solomon to the daughter of R. Jonah, whom he revered as a saint and a man of God. As a token of the admiration in which he held his friend, the following incident may be mentioned. It seems that it was the custom in Spain to name the first child in a family after his paternal grandfather; but Nachmanides ceded his right in behalf of his friend, and thus his daughter-in-law's first son was named Jonah. Another son of Nachmanides whom we know of was Nachman, to whom his father addressed his letters from Palestine, and who also wrote *Novellæ* to the Talmud, still extant in MS. But the later posterity of Nachmanides is better known to fame. R. Levi ben Gershom was one of his descendants; so was also R. Simeon Duran;³ whilst R. Jacob

Sasportas, in the eighteenth century,⁴ derived his pedigree from Nachmanides in the eleventh generation.

As to his calling, he was occupied as Rabbi and teacher, first in Gerona and afterwards in Barcelona. But this meant as much as if we should say of a man that he is a philanthropist by profession, with the only difference that the treasures of which Nachmanides disposed were more of a spiritual kind. For his livelihood he probably depended upon his medical practice.

I need hardly say that the life of Nachmanides, "whose words were held in Catalonia in almost as high authority as the Scriptures," was not without its great public events. At least we know of two.

The one was about the year 1232, on the occasion of the great struggle about Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, and the first book of his great Compendium of the Law. The Maimonists looked upon these works almost as a new revelation, whilst the Anti-Maimonists condemned both as heretical, or at least conducive to heresy.⁵ It would be profitless to reproduce the details of this sad affair. The motives may have been pure and good, but the actions were decidedly bad. People denounced each other, excommunicated each other, and did not (from either side) spare even the dead from the most bitter calumnies. Nachmanides stood between two fires. The French Rabbis, from whom most of the Anti-Maimonists were recruited, he held in very high esteem and considered himself as their pupil. Some of the leaders of this party were also his relatives. He, too, had, as we shall see later on, a theory of his own about God and the world little in agreement with that of Maimonides. It is worth noting that Nachmanides objected

to calling Maimonides "our teacher Moses" (Rabbenu Mosheh),⁶ thinking it improper to confer upon him the title by which the Rabbis honoured the Master of the Prophets. The very fact, however, that he had some theory of the Universe shows that he had a problem to solve, whilst the real French Rabbis were hardly troubled by difficulties of a metaphysical character. Indeed, Nachmanides pays them the rather doubtful compliment that Maimonides' work was not intended for them, who were barricaded by their faith and happy in their belief, wanting no protection against the works of Aristotle and Galen, by whose philosophy others might be led astray. In other words, their strength lay in an ignorance of Greek philosophy, to which the cultivated Jews of Spain would not aspire. Nachmanides was also a great admirer of Maimonides, whose virtues and great merits in the service of Judaism he describes in his letter to the French Rabbis. Thus, the only way left open to him was to play the part of the conciliator. The course of this struggle is fully described in every Jewish history. It is sufficient to say that, in spite of his great authority, Nachmanides was not successful in his effort to moderate the violence of either party, and that the controversy was at last settled through the harsh interference of outsiders who well-nigh crushed Maimonists and Anti-Maimonists alike.

The second public event in the life of Nachmanides was his Disputation, held in Barcelona, at the Court and, in the presence of King Jayme I., of Aragon, in the year 1263. It was the usual story. A convert to Christianity, named Pablo Christiani, who burned with zealous anxiety to see his former co-religionists saved, after many vain attempts in this direction, applied to the King of Aragon

to order Nachmanides to take part in a public disputation. Pablo maintained that he could prove the justice of the Messianic claims of Jesus from the Talmud and other Rabbinic writings. If he could only succeed in convincing the great Rabbi of Spain of the truth of his argument, the bulk of the Jews was sure to follow. By the way, it was the same Talmud which some twenty years previously was, at the instance of another Jewish convert, burned in Paris, for containing passages against Christianity. Nachmanides had to conform with the command of the king, and, on the 21st of July, 1263, was begun the controversy, which lasted for four or five days.

I do not think that there is in the whole domain of literature less profitable reading than that of the controversies between Jews and Christians. These public disputations occasionally forced the Jews themselves to review their position towards their own literature, and led them to draw clearer distinctions between what they regarded as religion and what as folklore. But beyond this, the polemics between Jews and Christians were barren of good results. If you have read one you have read enough for all time. The same casuistry and the same disregard of history turn up again and again. Nervousness and humility are always on the side of the Jews, who know that, whatever the result may be, the end will be persecution; arrogance is always on the side of their antagonists, who are supported by a band of Knights of the Holy Cross, prepared to prove the soundness of their cause at the point of their daggers.

Besides, was there enough common ground between Judaism and thirteenth century Christianity to have justified the hope of a mutual understanding? The Old

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Palestine, or enjoy other pleasures there; not even the chance of the restoration of sacrifices and the worship of the Temple is the greatest of Jewish expectations (connected with the appearance of the Messiah). What makes them long for his coming is the hope that they will then witness, in the company of the prophets and priests, a greater spread of purity and holiness than is now possible. In other words, the possibility for them to live a holy life after the will of God will be greater than now. But, on the other hand, considering that such a godly life under a Christian government requires greater sacrifices than it would under a Jewish king; and, considering again that the merits and rewards of a good act increase with the obstacles that are in the way of executing it—considering this, a Jew might even prefer to live under the King of Aragon than under the Messiah, where he would perforce act in accordance with the precepts of the Torah.

Now there is in this statement much that has only to be looked upon as a compliment to the government of Spain. I am inclined to think that if the alternative laid before Nachmanides had been a really practical one, he would have decided in favour of the clement rule of the Messiah in preference to that of the most cruel king on earth. But the fact that he repeats this statement in another place, where there was no occasion to be over polite to the Government, tends to show, as we have said, that the belief in the Messiah was not the basis on which Nachmanides' religion was built up.

The result of the controversy is contested by the different parties; the Christian writers claim the victory for Pablo, whilst the Jewish documents maintain that

the issue was with Nachmanides. In any case, "*Der Jude wird verbrannt*." For in the next year (1264) all the books of the Jews in Aragon were confiscated and submitted to the censorship of a commission, of which the well-known author of the *Pugio Fidei*, Raymund Martini, was, perhaps, the most important member. The books were not burned this time, but had to suffer a severe mutilation; the anti-Christian passages, or such as were supposed to be so, were struck out or obliterated. Nachmanides' account of the controversy, which he probably published from a sense of duty towards those whom he represented, was declared to contain blasphemies against the dominant religion. The pamphlet was condemned to be burned publicly, whilst the author was, as it seems, punished with expulsion from his country. It is not reported where Nachmanides found a home during the next three years; probably he had to accept the hospitality of his friends, either in Castile or in the south of France; but we know that in the year 1267 he left Europe and emigrated to Palestine.

Nachmanides was, at this juncture of his life, already a man of about seventy. But it would seem as if the seven decades which he had spent in the Spanish Peninsula were only meant as a preparation for the three years which he was destined to live in the Holy Land, for it was during this stage of his life that the greatest part of his *Commentary on the Pentateuch* was written. In this work, as is agreed on all sides, his finest thoughts and noblest sentiments were put down.

Before proceeding to speak of his works, let us first cast a glance at his letters from Palestine, forming as they do a certain link between his former life and that

which was to occupy him exclusively for the rest of his days. We have three letters, the first of which I shall translate here *in extenso*.

The letter was written soon after his arrival at Jerusalem in the year 1267. It was addressed to his son Nachman, and runs as follows:—

“The Lord shall bless thee, my son Nachman, and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem. Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children (Ps. cxxviii.), and thy table shall be like that of our father Abraham!⁹ In Jerusalem, the Holy City, I write this letter. For, thanks and praise unto the rock of my salvation, I was thought worthy by God to arrive here safely on the 9th of the month of Elul, and I remained there till the day after the Day of Atonement. Now I intend going to Hebron, to the sepulchre of our ancestors, to prostrate myself, and there to dig my grave. But what am I to say to you with regard to the country? Great is the solitude and great the wastes, and, to characterise it in short, the more sacred the places, the greater their desolation! Jerusalem is more desolate than the rest of the country: Judæa more than Galilee. But even in this destruction it is a blessed land. It has about 2000 inhabitants, about 300 Christians live there who escaped the sword of the Sultan. There are no Jews. For since the arrival of the Tartars, some fled, others died by the sword. There are only two brothers, dyers by trade, who have to buy their ingredients from the government. There the Ten Men¹⁰ meet, and on Sabbaths they hold service at their house. But we encouraged them, and we succeeded in finding a vacant house, built on pillars of marble with a beautiful arch. That we took for a synagogue. For the town is without a master, and whoever will take possession of the ruins can do so. We gave our offerings towards the repairs of the house. We have sent already to Shechem to fetch some scrolls of the Law from there which had been brought thither from Jerusalem at the invasion of the Tartars. Thus they will organise a synagogue and worship there. For continually people crowd to Jerusalem, men and women, from Damascus, Zobah

(Aleppo),¹¹ and from all parts of the country to see the Sanctuary and to mourn over it. He who thought us worthy to let us see Jerusalem in her desertion, he shall bless us to behold her again, built and restored, when the glory of the Lord will return unto her. But you, my son, and your brothers and the whole of our family, you all shall live to see the salvation of Jerusalem and the comfort of Zion. These are the words of your father who is yearning and forgetting, who is seeing and enjoying, Moses ben Nachman. Give also my peace to my pupil Moses, the son of Solomon, the nephew of your mother. I wish to tell him . . . that there, facing the holy temple, I have read his verses, weeping bitterly over them. May he who caused his name to rest in the Holy Temple increase your peace together with the peace of the whole community."

This letter may be illustrated by a few parallels taken from the appendix to Nachmanides' *Commentary to the Pentateuch*, which contains some rather incoherent notes which the author seems to have jotted down when he arrived in Jerusalem. After a lengthy account of the material as well as the spiritual glories of the holy city in the past, he proceeds to say:—

"A mournful sight I have perceived in thee (Jerusalem); only one Jew is here, a dyer, persecuted, oppressed and despised. At his house gather great and small when they can get the Ten Men. They are wretched folk, without occupation and trade, consisting of a few pilgrims and beggars, though the fruit of the land is still magnificent and the harvests rich. Indeed, it is still a blessed country, flowing with milk and honey. . . . Oh! I am the man who saw affliction. I am banished from my table, far removed from friend and kinsman, and too long is the distance to meet again. . . . I left my family, I forsook my house. There with my sons and daughters, and with the sweet and dear children whom I have brought up on my knees, I left also my soul. My heart and my eyes will dwell with them for ever. . . . But the loss of all this and of every other glory my eyes saw is compensated by hav-

ing now the joy of being a day in thy courts (O Jerusalem), visiting the ruins of the Temple and crying over the ruined Sanctuary ; where I am permitted to caress thy stones, to fondle thy dust, and to weep over thy ruins. I wept bitterly, but I found joy in my tears. I tore my garments, but I felt relieved by it."

Of some later date is his letter from Acra, which may be considered as a sort of ethical will, and which has been justly characterised as a eulogy of humility. Here is an extract from it:—

"Accustom yourself to speak gently to all men at all times, and thus you will avoid anger, which leads to so much sin. . . . Humility is the first of virtues ; for if you think how lowly is man, how great is God, you will fear Him and avoid sinfulness. On the humble man rests the divine glory ; the man that is haughty to others denies God. Look not boldly at one whom you address. . . . Regard every one as greater than thyself. . . . Remember always that you stand before God, both when you pray and when you converse with others. . . . Think before you speak. . . . Act as I have bidden you, and your words, and deeds, and thoughts, will be honest, and your prayers pure and acceptable before God."

The third letter is addressed to his son (R. Solomon?) who was staying (in the service of the king) in Castile. It is in its chief content a eulogy of chastity.¹² Probably Nachmanides had some dread of the dangerous allurements of the court, and he begs his son never to do anything of which he knows that his father would not approve, and to keep his father's image always before his eyes.

As to his works, we may divide them into two classes. The one would contain those of a strictly legalistic (Halachic), whilst the other those of a more homiletic-exegetical and devotional character (Agadic). As already indicated in the preliminary lines of this paper, I cannot dwell long

on the former class of our author's writings. It consists either of Glosses or Novellæ to the Talmud, in the style and manner of the French Rabbis, or of Compendia of certain parts of the Law after the model set by R. Isaac Alfasi or Maimonides, or in defences of the "Earlier Authorities" against the strictures made on them by a later generation. A few words must be said with regard to these defences; for they reveal that deep respect for authority which forms a special feature of Nachmanides' writings. His *Wars of the Lord*, in which he defends Alfasi against R. Zerachiah of Gerona, was undertaken when he was very young, whilst his defence of the author of the *Halachoth Gedoloth*¹³ against the attacks of Maimonides, which he began at a much more mature age, shows the same deference "to the great ones of the past." Indeed, he says in one place, "We bow before them (the earlier authorities), and though their words are not quite evident to us we submit to them"; or, as he expresses himself elsewhere, "Only he who dips (deeply enough) in the wisdom of the 'ancient ones' will drink the pure (old) wine." But it would be unjust to the genius of Nachmanides to represent him as a blind worshipper of authority. Humble and generous in disposition, he certainly would bow before every recognised authority, and he would also think it his duty to take up the cudgels for him as long as there was even the least chance of making an honourable defence. But when this chance had gone, when Nachmanides was fully convinced that his hero was in the wrong, he followed no guide but truth. "Notwithstanding," he says in his introduction to the defences of the *Halachoth Gedoloth*, "my desire and delight to be the disciple of the Earlier Authorities, to maintain their views and to assert them, I

do not consider myself a 'donkey carrying books.' I will explain their way and appreciate their value, but when their views are inconceivable to my thoughts, I will plead in all modesty, but shall judge according to the sight of my eyes. And when the meaning is clear I shall flatter none, for the Lord gives wisdom in all times and ages." But, on the other hand, there seems to have been a certain sort of literary agnosticism about Nachmanides which made it very difficult for him to find the "clear meaning." The passage in the *Wars of the Lord* to the effect "that there is in the art (of commenting) no such certain demonstration as in mathematics or astronomy," is well known and has often been quoted; but still more characteristic of this literary agnosticism is the first paragraph of the above-mentioned defences of the *Halachoth Gedoloth*. Whilst all his predecessors accepted, on the authority of R. Simlai,¹⁴ the number (613) of the commandments as an uncontested fact, and based their compositions on it, Nachmanides questions the whole matter, and shows that the passages relating to this enumeration of laws are only of a homiletical nature, and thus of little consequence. Nay, he goes so far as to say, "Indeed the system how to number the commandments is a matter in which I suspect all of us (are mistaken) and the truth must be left to him who will solve all doubts." We should thus be inclined to think that this adherence to the words of the earlier Authorities was at least as much due to this critical scepticism as to his conservative tendencies.

The space left to me I shall devote to the second class of his writings, in which Nachmanides worked less after given types. These reveal to us more of his inner being, and offer us some insight into his theological system.

The great problem which seems to have presented itself to Nachmanides' mind was less how to reconcile religion with reason than how to reconcile man with religion. What is man? The usual answer is not flattering. He is an animal that owes its existence to the same instinct that produces even the lower creatures, and he is condemned, like them, to go to a place of worm and maggot. But, may not one ask, why should a creature so lowly born, and doomed to so hapless a future, be burdened with the awful responsibility of knowing that he is destined "to give reckoning and judgment before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He"? It is true that man is also endowed with a heavenly soul, but this only brings us back again to the antithesis of flesh and spirit which was the stumbling-block of many a theological system. Nor does it help us much towards the solution of the indicated difficulty; for what relation can there be between this *materia impura* of body and the pure intellect of soul? And again, must not the unfavourable condition in which the latter is placed through this uncongenial society heavily clog and suppress all aspiration for perfection? It is "a house divided against itself," doomed to an everlasting contest, without hope for co-operation or even of harmony.

The works *The Sacred Letter* and *The Law of Man* may be considered as an attempt by Nachmanides, if not to remove, at least to relieve the harshness of this antithesis. The former, in which he blames Maimonides for following Aristotle in denouncing certain desires implanted in us by nature as ignominious and unworthy of man, may, perhaps, be characterised as a vindication of the flesh from a religious point of view. The contempt in

which "that Greek," as Nachmanides terms Aristotle, held the flesh is inconsistent with the theory of the religious man, who believes that everything (including the body, with all its functions) is created by God, whose work is perfect and good, without impure or inharmonious parts. It is only sin and neglect that disfigure God's creations. I cannot enter into any further details of this work, but I may be permitted to remark that there is a very strong similarity between the tendency of the *Sacred Letter* and certain leading ideas of Milton. Indeed, if the first two chapters of the former were a little condensed and put into English, they could not be better summarised than by the famous lines in the *Paradise Lost*:—

Whatever hypocrites austere talk
Of purity, and place, and innocence,
Defaming as impure what God declares
Pure, and commands to some, leaves free to all,
Our Maker bids increase; who bids abstain
But our destroyer, foe to God and man?
Hail, wedded love, mysterious law! . . .
Far be it that I should write thee sin or blame
Or think thee unbefitting holiest place,
Perpetual fountain of domestic sweets.

The second of these two works, the *Law of Man*, may be regarded as a sanctification of grief, and particularly of the grief of griefs, death. The bulk of the book is legalistic, treating of mourning rites, burial customs, and similar topics; but there is much in the preface which bears on our subject. For here again Nachmanides takes the opportunity of combating a chilling philosophy, which tries to arm us against suffering by stifling our emotions.

"My son," he says, "be not persuaded by certain propositions of the great philosophers who endeavour to harden our hearts and to deaden our sensations by their idle comfort, which consists in denying the past and despairing of the future. One of them has even declared that there is nothing in the world over the loss of which it is worth crying, and the possession of which would justify joy. This is an heretical view. Our perfect Torah bids us to be joyful in the day of prosperity and to shed tears in the day of misfortune. It in no way forbids crying or demands of us to suppress our grief. On the contrary, the Torah suggests to us that to mourn over heavy losses is equivalent to a service of God, leading us, as it does, to reflect on our end and ponder over our destiny."

This destiny, as well as Reward and Punishment in general, is treated in the concluding chapter of the *Law of Man*, which is known under the title of *The Gate of Reward*.¹⁵ Nachmanides does not conceal from himself the difficulties besetting inquiries of this description. He knows well enough that in the last instance we must appeal to that implicit faith in the inscrutable justice of God with which the believer begins. Nevertheless he thinks that only the "despisers of wisdom" would fail to bring to this faith as full a conviction as possible, which latter is only to be gained by speculation. I shall have by and by occasion to refer to the results of this speculation. Here we must only notice the fact of Nachmanides insisting on the *bodily* resurrection which will take place after the coming of the Messiah, and will be followed by the *Olam Habba*¹⁶ (the life in the world to come) of which the Rabbis spoke.

Irrational as this belief may look, it is only a consequence of his theory, which, as we have seen, assigns even to the flesh an almost spiritual importance. Indeed, he thinks that the soul may have such an influence on the body as to transform the latter into so pure an essence that it will become safe for eternity. For, as he hints in another place, by the continual practising of a thing the whole man, the body included, becomes so identified with the thing that we call him after it, just as the Holy Singer said: I am prayer,¹⁷ so that —

Oft converse with heavenly habitants
 Begins to cast a beam on the outward shape,
 The unpolluted temple of the mind,
 And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
 Till all be made immortal.

But if even the body holds such a high position as to make all its instincts and functions, if properly regulated, a service of God, and to destine it for a glorious future of eternal bliss and rejoicing in God, we can easily imagine what a high place the soul must occupy in the system of Nachmanides. To be sure it is a much higher one than that to which philosophy would fain admit her. A beautiful parable of the Persian poet Yellaladeen (quoted by the late Mr. Lowell) narrates that "One knocked at the beloved's door, and a voice asked from within, 'Who is there?' and he answered, 'It is I.' Then the voice said, 'This house will not hold me and thee,' and the door was not opened. Then went the lover into the desert and fasted and prayed in solitude, and after a year he returned and knocked again at the door, and again the voice asked 'Who is there?' and he said 'It is thyself'; and the door

was opened to him." This is also the difference between the two schools—the mystical and the philosophical—with regard to the soul. With the rationalist the soul is indeed a superior abstract intelligence created by God, but, like all His creations, has an existence of its own, and is thus separated from God. With the mystic, however, the soul is God, or a direct emanation from God. "For he who breathes into another thing (Gen. ii. 7) gives unto it something of his own breath (or soul)," and as it is said in Job xxxii. 8, "And the soul of the Almighty giveth them understanding." This emanation, or rather immanence—for Nachmanides insists in another place that the Hebrew term employed for it, *Aziluth*,¹⁸ means a permanent dwelling with the thing emanating—which became manifest with the creation of man, must not be confounded with the moving soul (or the *Nephesh Chayah*),¹⁹ which is common to man with all creatures.

It may be remarked here that Nachmanides endows all animals with a soul which is derived from the "Superior Powers," and its presence is proved by certain marks of intelligence which they show. By this fact he tries to account for the law prohibiting cruelty to animals, "all souls belonging to God." Their original disposition was, it would seem, according to Nachmanides, peaceful and harmless.

About them frisking played

All beasts of earth, since wild, and of all chace

In wood or wilderness, forest or den.

It was only after man had sinned that war entered into creation, but with the coming of the Messiah, when sin will disappear, all the living beings will regain their

primæval gentleness, and be reinstituted in their first rights.

The special soul of man, however, or rather the "over-soul," was pre-existent to the creation of the world, treasured up as a wave in the sea or fountain of souls — dwelling in the eternal light and holiness of God. There, in God, the soul abides in its ideal existence before it enters into its material life through the medium of man; though it must be noted that, according to Nachmanides' belief in the Transmigration of souls, it is not necessary to perceive in the soul of every new-born child, "a fresh message from heaven" coming directly from the fountain-head. Nachmanides finds this belief indicated in the commandment of levirate marriage, where the child born of the deceased brother's wife inherits not only the name of the brother of his actual father, but also his soul, and thus perpetuates his existence on earth. The fourth verse of Ecclesiastes ii. Nachmanides seems to interpret to mean that the very generation which passes away comes up again, by which he tries to explain the difficulty of God's visiting the iniquity of the fathers on their children; the latter being the very fathers who committed the sins. However, whatever trials and changes the soul may have to pass through during its bodily existence, its origin is in God and thither it will return in the end, "just as the waters rise always to the same high level from which their source sprang forth."

It is for this man, with a body so superior, and a soul so sublime — more sublime than the angels — that the world was *created*. I emphasise the last word, for the belief in the creation of the world by God from nothing forms, according to Nachmanides, the first of the three funda-

mental dogmas of Judaism. The other two also refer to God's relation to the world and man. They are the belief in God's Providence and his *Yediah*.²⁰ Creation from nothing is for Nachmanides the keynote to his whole religion, since it is only by this fact, as he points out in many places, that God gains real dominion over nature. For, as he says, as soon as we admit the eternity of matter, we must (logically) deny God even "the power of enlarging the wing of a fly, or shortening the leg of an ant." But the whole Torah is nothing if not a record of God's mastery in and over the world, and of His miraculous deeds. One of the first proclamations of Abraham to his generation was that God is the Lord (or Master) of the world (Gen. xviii. 33). The injunction given to Abraham, and repeated afterwards to the whole of Israel (Gen. xvii. 2, and Deut. xxi. 13), to be perfect with God, Nachmanides numbers as one of the 613 commandments, and explains it to mean that man must have a whole belief in God without blemish or reservation, and acknowledge Him possessed of power over nature and the world, man and beast, devil and angel, power being attributable to Him alone. Indeed, when the angel said to Jacob, "Why dost thou ask after my name" (Gen. xxxii. 29), he meant to indicate by his question the impotence of the heavenly host, so that there is no use in knowing their name, the power and might belonging only to God.

We may venture even a step further, and maintain that in Nachmanides' system there is hardly room left for such a thing as nature or "the order of the world." There are only two categories of miracles by which the world is governed, or in which God's Providence is seen. The one is the category of the manifest miracles, as the ten

plagues in Egypt, or the crossing of the Red Sea; the other is that of the hidden miracles, which we do not perceive as such, because of their frequency and continuity. "No man," he declares, "can share in the Torah of our Teacher, Moses (that is, can be considered a follower of the Jewish religion), unless he believes that all our affairs and events, whether they concern the masses or the individual, are all miracles (worked by the direct will of God), attributing nothing to nature or to the order of the world." Under this second order he classes all the promises the Torah makes to the righteous, and the punishments with which evil-doers are threatened. For, as he points out in many places, there is nothing in the nature of the commandments themselves that would make their fulfilment necessarily prolong the life of man, and cause the skies to pour down rain, or, on the other hand, would associate disobedience to them with famine and death. All these results can, therefore, only be accomplished in a supernatural way by the direct workings of God.

Thus miracles are raised to a place in the regular scheme of things, and the difficulty regarding the possibility of God's interferences with nature disappears by their very multiplication. But a still more important point is, that, by this unbroken chain of miracles, which unconditionally implies God's presence to perform them, Nachmanides arrives at a theory establishing a closer contact between the Deity and the world than that set forth by other thinkers. Thus, he insists that the term *Shechinah*, or *Cabod*²¹ (Glory of God), must not be understood, with some Jewish philosophers, as something separate from God, or as *glory created* by God. "Were this the case," he proceeds to say, "we could not possibly

say, 'Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place,' since every mark of worship to anything *created* involves the sin of idolatry." Such terms as *Shechinah*, or *Cabod*, can therefore only mean the immediate divine presence. This proves, as may be noted in passing, how unphilosophical the idea of those writers is who maintain that the rigid monotheism of the Jews makes God so transcendental that He is banished from the world. As we see, it is just this assertion of His absolute Unity which not only suffers no substitute for God, but also removes every separation between Him and the world. Hence also Nachmanides insists that the prophecy even of the successors of Moses was a direct communion of God with the prophet, and not, as others maintained, furnished through the medium of an angel.

The third fundamental dogma, *Yediah*, includes, according to Nachmanides, not only the omniscience of God — as the term is usually translated — but also His recognition of mankind and His special concern in them. Thus, he explains the words in the Bible with regard to Abraham, "For I know him" (Gen. xviii. 19), to indicate the special attachment of God's Providence to the patriarch, which, on account of his righteousness, was to be uninterrupted for ever; whilst in other places we have to understand, under God's knowledge of a thing, his determination to deal with it compassionately, as, for instance, when Scripture says that God knew (Exod. ii. 25), it means that His relation to Israel emanated from His attribute of mercy and love. But just as God knows (which means loves) the world, He requires also to be recognised and known by it. "For this was the purpose of the whole creation, that man should recognise and know Him and give praise to His name," as

it is said, "Everything that is called by my name (meaning, chosen to promulgate God's name), for my glory have I created it."

It is this fact which gives Israel their high prerogative, for by receiving the Torah they were the first to know God's name, to which they remained true in spite of all adversities; and thus accomplished God's intention in creating the world. It is, again, by this Torah that the whole of Israel not only succeeded in being real prophets (at the moment of the Revelation), but also became *Segulah*,²² which indicates the inseparable attachment between God and His people, whilst the righteous who never disobey His will become the seat of His throne.

The position of the rest of humanity is also determined by their relation to the Torah. "It is," Nachmanides tells us, "a main principle to know that all that man contrives to possess of knowledge and wisdom is only the fruits of the Torah or the fruits of its fruits. But for this knowledge there would be no difference between man and the lower animated species. The existence of the civilised nations of the world does not disprove this rule "both Christians and Mahometans being also the heirs of the Torah. For when the Romans gained strength over Israel they made them translate the Torah which they studied, and they even accommodated some of their laws and institutions to those of the Bible." Those nations, however, who live far away from the centre of the world (the Holy Land) and never come into contact with Israel are outside the pale of civilisation, and can hardly be ranked together with the human species. "They are the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory."

What Nachmanides meant by maintaining that all knowledge and wisdom were "the fruits of the Torah, or the fruits of these fruits," will be best seen from his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*. I have already made use of this Commentary in the preceding quotations, but, being the greatest of the works of Nachmanides, it calls for some special attention by itself. Its general purpose is edification, or as he says, "to appease the mind of the students (labouring under persecution and troubles) when they read the portion on Sabbaths and festivals, and to attract their heart by simple explanations and sweet words." The explanations occupy a considerable space. As Dr. Perles has shown in his able essay on this work of Nachmanides, our author neglected no resource of philology or archæology accessible in his age which could contribute to establish the "simple explanations" on a sound scientific basis. The prominent feature of this Commentary, however, is the "sweet words." Indeed, how sweet and soothing to his contemporaries must have been such words as we read at the end of the "Song of Moses" (Deut. xxxii.): "And behold there is nothing conditional in this Song. It is a charter testifying that we shall have to suffer heavily for our sins, but that, nevertheless, God will not destroy us, being reconciled to us (though we shall have no merits), and forgiving our sins for his name's sake alone. . . . And so our Rabbis said, Great is this song, embracing as it does both the past (of Israel) and the future, this world and the world to come. . . . And if this song were the composition of a mere astrologer we should be constrained to believe in it, considering that all its words were fulfilled. How much more have we to hope with all our hearts and to trust to the word of God, through the mouth

of his prophet Moses, the faithful in all his house, like unto whom there was none, whether before him or after him." A part of these sweet words may also be seen in the numerous passages in which he attempts to account for various laws, and to detect their underlying principles.

For though "the Torah is the expression of God's simple and absolute will, which man has to follow without any consideration of reward," still this will is not arbitrary, and even that class of laws which are called *chukkim*²³ (which means, according to some Jewish commentators, motiveless decrees) have their good reasons, notwithstanding that they are unfathomable to us. "They are all meant for the good of man, either to keep aloof from us something hurtful, or to educate us in goodness, or to remove from us an evil belief and to make us know his name. This is what they (the Rabbis) meant by saying that commandments have a purifying purpose, namely, that man being purified and tried by them becomes as one without alloy of bad thoughts and unworthy qualities." Indeed, the soul of man is so sensitive to every impurity that it suffers a sort of infection even by an unintentional sin. Hence the injunction to bring a *Korban* (sacrifice) even in this case; the effect of the *Korban*, as its etymology (*Karab*)²⁴ indicates, is to bring man back to God, or rather to facilitate this approach. All this again is, as Nachmanides points out, only an affluence from God's mercy and love to mankind. God derives no benefit from it. "If he be righteous what can he give thee?" And even those laws and institutions which are intended to commemorate God's wonders and the creation of the world (for instance, the Passover festival and the Sabbath) are not meant for His glorification, or, as Heine maliciously expressed it:—

Der Weltkapellenmeister hier oben
Er selbst sogar hört gerne loben
Gleichfalls seine Werke. . . .

"For all the honour (we give to Him), and the praising of His work are counted by Him less than nothing and as vanity to Him." What He desires is that we may know the truth, and be confirmed in it, for this makes us worthy of finding in Him "our Protector and King."

The lessons which Nachmanides draws from the various Biblical narratives also belong to these "sweet words." They are mostly of a typical character. For, true as all the stories in the Scriptures are, "the whole Torah is," as he tells us (with allusion to Gen. v. 1.), "the book of the generations of Adam," or, as we should say, a history of humanity written in advance. Thus the account of the six days of the creation is turned into a prophecy of the most important events which would occur during the succeeding six thousand years, whilst the Sabbath is a forecast of the millennium in the seventh thousand, which will be the day of the Lord. Jacob and Esau are, as in the old Rabbinic homilies generally, the prototypes of Israel and Rome; and so is the battle of Moses and Joshua with Amalek indicative of the war which Elijah and the Messiah the son of Joseph will wage against Edom (the prototype of Rome), before the Redeemer from the house of David will appear.²⁵ Sometimes these stories convey both a moral and a pre-justification of what was destined to happen to Israel. So Nachmanides' remarks with reference to Sarah's treatment of Hagar (Gen. xvi. 6): "Our mother Sarah sinned greatly by inflicting this pain on Hagar, as did also Abraham, who allowed such a thing to pass; but God saw her affliction and rewarded her by a

son (the ancestor of a wild race), who would inflict on the seed of Abraham and Sarah every sort of oppression." In this he alluded to the Islamic empires. Nor does he approve of Abraham's conduct on the occasion of his coming to Egypt, when he asked Sarah to pass as his sister (Gen. xii.). "Unintentionally," Nachmanides says, "Abraham, under the fear of being murdered, committed a great sin when he exposed his virtuous wife to such a temptation. For he ought to have trusted that God would save both him and his wife. . . . It is on account of this deed that his children had to suffer exile under the rule of Pharaoh. There, where the sin was committed, also the judgment took place." It is also worth noticing that, in opposition to Maimonides, he allows no apology for the attack of Simeon and Levi on the population of Shechem (Gen. xxxiv. 25). It is true that they were idolaters, immoral, and steeped in every abomination; but Jacob and his sons were not commissioned with executing justice on them. The people of Shechem trusted their word, therefore they ought to have spared them. Hence Jacob's protest, and his curse against their wrath, which would have been quite unjustified had he looked on the action of his sons as a good work.

Besides these typical meanings, the matters of the Torah have also their symbolical importance, which places them almost above the sphere of human conception; they are neither exactly what they seem to be nor entirely what their name implies, but a reflex from things unseen, which makes any human interference both preposterous and dangerous. Of "the things *called* Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge," Nachmanides tells us that their mystery is very great, reaching into higher worlds. Otherwise, why

should God, who is good and the dispenser of good, have prevented Adam from eating the fruit (of the latter), whilst in another place he says : " And if thou wilt be worthy, and understand the mystery of the word *Bereshith*²⁶ (with which the Torah begins), thou wilt see that in truth the Scripture, though apparently speaking of matters here below (on earth), is always pointing to things above (heaven);" for "every glory and every wonder, and every deep mystery, and all beautiful wisdom are hidden in the Torah, sealed up in her treasures."

It is very characteristic of the bent of Nachmanides' mind, that he is perhaps the first Jewish writer who mentions the apocryphal book *The Wisdom of Solomon*, which he knew from a Syriac version, and which he believed to be genuine. And when we read there (vii. 7-25), "Wherefore I prayed and understanding was given to me. I called upon God and the spirit of wisdom came upon me. . . . For God has given me unmistakable knowledge to know how the world was made, and the operations of the planets. The beginning, ending, and midst of the times, the alterations and the turnings of the sun, the changes of the seasons, the natures of the living creatures and the furies of the wild beasts, the force of the spirits and the reasonings of men, the diversities of plants and the virtues of the roots. All such things that are either secret or manifest, them I knew"—the wise king was, according to Nachmanides (who quotes the passages which I have just cited), speaking of the Torah, which is identical with this wisdom, a wisdom which existed before the creation, and by which God planned the world. Hence it bears the impression of all the universe, whilst on the other hand when it is said, "The king brought me into his chambers,"

those secret recesses of the Torah are meant in which all the great mysteries relating to Creation and to the Chariot (Ezekiel i.) are hidden.

We must content ourselves with these few sparks struck from the glowing fires of these inner compartments, which, imperfectly luminous as my treatment has left them, may yet shed some light on the personality of Nachmanides, which is the main object of this essay. But I do not propose to accompany the mystic into the "chambers of the king," lest we may soon get into a labyrinth of obscure terms and strange ways of thinking for which the Ariadne thread is still wanting. We might also be confronted by the Fifty Gates of Understanding, the Thirty-Two Paths of Wisdom, and the Two Hundred and Thirty-One Permutations or Ciphers of the Alphabet, the key to which I do not hold. It is also questionable whether it would always be worth while to seek for it. When one, for instance, sees such a heaping on of nouns (with some Cabbalists) as the Land of Life, the Land of Promise, the Lord of the World, the Foundation Stone, Zion, Mother, Daughter, Sister, the Congregation of Israel, the Twin Roes, the Bride, Blue, End, Oral Law, Sea, Wisdom, etc., meant to represent the same thing or attribute, and to pass one into another, one cannot possibly help feeling some suspicion that one stands before a conglomerate of words run riot, over which the writer had lost all control.

Indeed Nachmanides himself, in the preface to the above-mentioned Commentary, gives us the kind advice not to meditate, or rather brood, over the mystical hints which are scattered over this work, "speculation being (in such matters) folly, and reasoning over them fraught

with danger." Indeed, the danger is obvious. I have, to give one or two instances, already alluded to the theory which accepts the Torah or the Wisdom as an agent in the creation of the world. But the mystic pushes further, and asks for the Primal Being to which this Wisdom owes its origin. The answer given is from the great Nothing, as it is written, And the Wisdom shall be found from Nothing.²⁷ What is intended by this, if it means anything, is probably to divest the first cause of every possible quality which by its very qualifying nature must be limiting and exclusive. Hence, God becomes the Unknowable. But suppose a metaphysical Hamlet, who, handling words indelicately, should impetuously exclaim, To be or not to be, that is the question?—into what abyss of utter negations would he drag all those who despair, by his terrible Nothing.

On the other hand, into what gross anthropomorphisms may we be drawn by roughly handling certain metaphors which some Cabbalists have employed in their struggling after an adequate expression of God's manifestations in His attribute of love, if we forget for a single moment that they are only figures of speech, but liable to get defiled by the slightest touch of an unchaste thought.

But the greater the dangers that beset the path of mysticism, the deeper the interest which we feel in the mystic. In connection with the above-mentioned warning, Nachmanides cites the words from the Scriptures, "But let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the Lord, lest he break forth upon them" (Exod. xix. 24). Nevertheless, when we read in the Talmud the famous story of the four Rabbis²⁸ who went up into the *Pardes*, or Garden of Mystical Contemplation, we do not

withhold our sympathy, either from Ben Azzai, who shot a glance and died, or from Ben Zoma, who shot a glance and was struck (in his mind). Nay, we feel the greatest admiration for these daring spirits, who, in their passionate attempt to "break through" the veil before the Infinite, hazarded their lives, and even that which is dearer than life, their minds, for a single glance. And did R. Meir deny his sympathies even to Other One or Elisha ben Abuyah, who "cut down the plants"? He is said to have heard a voice from heaven, "Return, oh backsliding children, except Other One," which prevented his repentance. Poor fallen Acher, he mistook hell for heaven. But do not the struggle and despair which led to this unfortunate confusion rather plead for our commiseration?

Nachmanides, however, in his gentle way, did not mean to storm heaven. Like R. Akiba, "he entered in peace, and departed in peace." And it was by this peacefulness of his nature that he gained an influence over posterity which is equalled only by that of Maimonides. "If he was not a profound thinker," like the author of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, he had that which is next best — "he felt profoundly." Some writers of a rather reactionary character even went so far as to assign to him a higher place than to Maimonides. This is unjust. What a blank would there have been in Jewish thought but for Maimonides' great work, on which the noblest thinkers of Israel fed for centuries! As long as Job and Ecclesiastes hold their proper place in the Bible, and the Talmud contains hundreds of passages suggesting difficulties relating to such problems as the creation of the world, God's exact relation to it, the origin of evil, free will and pre-

destination, none will persuade me that philosophy does not form an integral part of Jewish tradition, which, in its historical developments, took the shape which Maimonides and his successors gave to it. If Maimonides' *Guide*, which he considered as an interpretation of the Bible and of many strange sayings in the old Rabbinic homilies in the Talmud, is Aristotelian in its tone, so is tradition too; even the Talmud in many places betrays all sorts of foreign influences, and none would think of declaring it un-Jewish on this ground. I may also remark in passing that the certainty with which some writers deprecate the aids which religion may receive from philosophy is a little too hasty. For the question will always remain, What religion? The religion of R. Moses of Tachau or R. Joseph Jabez²⁹ would certainly have been greatly endangered by the slightest touch of speculation, while that of Bachya,³⁰ Maimonides, Jedaiah of Bedres, and Delmedigo undoubtedly received from philosophy its noblest support, and became intensified by the union.

But apart from that consideration, the sphere of the activity of these two leaders seems to have been so widely different that it is hardly just to consider them as antagonists, or at least to emphasise the antagonism too much. Maimonides wrote his chief work, the *Guide*, for the few elect, who, like Ibn Tibbon³¹ for instance, would traverse whole continents if a single syllogism went wrong. And if he could be of use to one wise man of this stamp, Maimonides would do so at the risk of "saying things unsuitable for ten thousand fools." But with Nachmanides, it would seem, it was these ten thousand who formed the main object of his tender care. They are, as we have seen, cultivated men, indeed "students," having

enjoyed a proper education; but the happy times of abstract thinking have gone, and being under a perpetual strain of persecutions and cares, they long for the Sabbath and Festivals, which would bring them both bodily and spiritual recreation. They find no fault with religion, a false syllogism does not jar on their ears; what they are afraid of is that, being engaged as they are, all the six days of work, in their domestic affairs, religion may be too good a thing for them. "To appease their minds," to edify them, to make life more sweet and death less terrible to them, and to show them that even their weaknesses, as far as they are conditioned by nature, are not irreconcilable with a holy life, was what Nachmanides strove after. Now and then he permits them a glance into the mystical world in which he himself loved to move, but he does not care to stifle their senses into an idle contemplation, and passes quickly to some more practical application. To be sure, the tabernacle is nothing but a complete map of the superlunar world; but nevertheless its rather minute description is meant to teach us "that God desires us to work."

This tendency toward being useful to the great majority of mankind may account for the want of consistency of which Nachmanides was so often accused. It is only the logician who can afford to be thoroughgoing in his theory, and even he would become most absurd and even dangerous but for the redeeming fact "that men are better than their principles." But with Nachmanides these "principles" would have proved even more fatal. Could he, for instance, have upset authority in the face of the ten thousand? They need to be guided rather than to guide. But he does not want them to follow either the Gaon or

anybody else slavishly, "the gates of wisdom never having been shut," whilst on the other hand he hints to them that there is something divine in every man, which places him at least on the same high level with any authority. Take another instance—his wavering attitude between the Maimonists and the Anti-Maimonists, for which he was often censured. Apart from other reasons, to which I have pointed above, might he not have felt that, in spite of his personal admiration for Maimonides' genius, he had no right to put himself entirely on the side where there was little room for the ten thousand who were entrusted to his guidance, whilst the French Rabbis, with all their prejudices and intolerance, would never deny their sympathies to simple emotional folk?

This tender and absorbing care for the people in general may also account for the fact that we do not know of a single treatise by Nachmanides of a purely Cabbalistic character in the style of the *Book of Weight*, by Moses de Leon, or the *Orchard*, by R. Moses Cordovora, or the *Tree of Life* by R. Isaac Loria.³² The story that attributes to him the discovery of the *Zohar* in a cave in Palestine, from whence he sent it to Catalonia, needs as little refutation as the other story connected with his conversion to the Cabbalah, which is even more silly and of such a nature as not to bear repetition. The *Lilac of Mysteries*³³ and other mystical works passed also for a long time under his name, but their claim to this honour has been entirely disproved by the bibliographers, and they rank now among the *pseudepigraphica*. It is true that R. Nissim, of Gerona, said of Nachmanides that he was too much addicted to the belief in the Cabbalah, and as a fellow-countryman he may have had some personal

knowledge about the matter. But as far as his writings go, this belief finds expression only in incidental remarks and occasional citations from the *Bahir*,⁸⁴ which he never thrusts upon the reader. It was chiefly when philosophy called in question his deep sympathies with even lower humanity, and threatened to withdraw them from those ennobling influences under which he wanted to keep them, that he asserted his mystical theories.

Nachmanides' inconsistency has also proved beneficial in another respect. For mysticism has, by its over-emphasising of the divine in man, shown a strong tendency to remove God altogether and replace Him by the creature of His hands. Witness only the theological bubble of Shabbethai Tsebi—happily it burst quickly enough—which resulted in mere idolatry (in more polite language, Hero Worship) on the one side, and in the grossest antinomianism on the other. Nachmanides, however, with a happy inconsistency, combined with the belief of man's origin in God, a not less strong conviction of man's liability to sin, of the fact that he *does* sin—even the patriarchs were not free from it, as we have seen above—and that this sin *does* alienate man from God. This healthy control over man's extravagant idea of his own species was with Nachmanides also a fruit of the Torah, within the limits of which everything must move, the mystic and his aspirations included, whilst its fair admixture of 365 *Do not's* with 248 *Do's* preserved him from that "holy doing nothing" which so many mystics indulged in, and made his a most active life.

Much of this activity was displayed in Palestine, "the land to which the providence of God is especially attached," and which was, as with R. Judah Hallelevi, always

"his ideal home." There he not only completed his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, but also erected synagogues, and engaged in organising communities, whose tone he tried to elevate both by his lectures and by his sermons. His career in Palestine was not a long one, for he lived there only about three years, and in 1270 he must already have been dead. A pretty legend narrates that when he emigrated to Palestine his pupils asked him to give them a sign enabling them to ascertain the day of his death. He answered them that on that day a rift in the shape of a lamp would be seen in the tombstone of his mother. After three years a pupil suddenly noticed this rift, when the mourning over the Rabbi began. Thus, stone, or anything else earthly, breaks finally, and the life of the master passes into light.

What life meant to him, how deeply he was convinced that there is no other life but that originating in God, how deeply stirred his soul was by the consciousness of sin, what agonies the thought of the alienation from God caused him, how he felt that there is nothing left to him but to throw himself upon the mercy of God, and how he rejoiced in the hope of a final reunion with Him — of all these sentiments we find the best expression in the following religious poem, with which this paper may conclude. Nachmanides composed it in Hebrew, and it is still preserved in some rituals as a hymn, recited on the Day of Atonement. It is here given in the English translation of Mrs. Henry Lucas.³⁵

Ere time began, ere age to age had thrilled,
I waited in his storehouse, as he willed ;
He gave me being, but, my years fulfilled,
I shall be summoned back before the King.

He called the hidden to the light of day,
To right and left, each side the fountain lay,
From out the stream and down the steps, the way
That led me to the garden of the King.

Thou gavest me a light my path to guide,
To prove my heart's recesses still untried;
And as I went, thy voice in warning cried:
"Child! fear thou him who is thy God and King!"

True weight and measure learned my heart from thee;
If blessings follow, then what joy for me!
If nought but sin, all mine the shame must be,
For that was not determined by the King.

I hasten, trembling, to confess the whole
Of my transgressions, ere I reach the goal
Where mine own words must witness 'gainst my soul,
And who dares doubt the writing of the King?

Erring, I wandered in the wilderness,
In passion's grave nigh sinking powerless;
Now deeply I repent, in sore distress,
That I kept not the statutes of the King!

With worldly longings was my bosom fraught,
Earth's idle toys and follies all I sought;
Ah! when he judges joys so dearly bought,
How greatly shall I fear my Lord and King!

Now conscience-stricken, humbled to the dust,
Doubting himself, in thee alone his trust,
He shrinks in terror back, for God is just —
How can a sinner hope to reach the King?

Oh, be thy mercy in the balance laid,
To hold thy servant's sins more lightly weighed,
When, his confession penitently made,
He answers for his guilt before the King.

Thine is the love, O God, and thine the grace,
 That folds the sinner in its mild embrace;
 Thine the forgiveness, bridging o'er the space
 'Twixt man's works and the task set by the King.

Unheeding all my sins, I cling to thee;
 I know that mercy shall thy footstool be:
 Before I call, oh, do thou answer me,
 For nothing dare I claim of thee, my King!

O thou, who makest guilt to disappear,
 My help, my hope, my rock, I will not fear;
 Though thou the body hold in dungeon drear,
 The soul has found the palace of the King!

POSTSCRIPT

The third letter of Nachmanides to which I have alluded above, is embodied in the following will by R. Solomon, son of the martyr Isaac. Neither the date nor the country of the testator is known, but style and language make it probable that he was a Spanish Jew, and lived in the fourteenth century. I give here a translation from the whole document as it is to be found in the Manuscripts.

These are the regulations which I, Solomon, the son of the martyr, Rabbi Isaac, the son of R. Zadok, of blessed memory, draw up for myself. That as long as I am in good health, and free from accident, and think of it, I shall not eat before I have studied one page of the Talmud or of its commentaries. Should I transgress this rule intentionally, I must not drink wine on that day, or I shall pay half a *Zehub*⁸⁶ to charity. Again, that I shall every week read the Lesson twice in the Hebrew text, and once in the Aramaic version. Should I intentionally omit completing the Lesson as above, then I must pay two *Zehubs* to charity. Again, that I shall every Sabbath take three meals, consisting of bread or fruit. Should I omit to do so, I must give in charity half a *Zehub*.

Again, in order to subdue my appetites, and not to enjoy in this world more than is necessary for the maintenance of my body, I must not eat at one meal more than one course of meat, and not more than two courses altogether; nor must I drink more than two cups of wine at one meal, apart from the blessing-cup (over which grace is said), except on Sabbath, Festivals, Chanukah (the Maccabean Dedication Feast), New Moon, and at other religious meals (for instance, wedding-dinners and similar festive occasions). Again, I must not have any regular meal on the day preceding Sabbath or Festivals. I must not have during the day more than one course, so that I shall enter upon the holy day with a good appetite. Should I transgress this resolve intentionally I shall have to fast a day, or to pay two *Zehubs*. Again, that I shall not eat the fish called *burbot*,³⁷ if I think of it. Again, even on the above-mentioned days, I must not eat more than three courses at a meal, nor drink more than three cups of wine, exclusive of the blessing-cup. Again, . . . I must not swear by God, nor mention the name of Heaven without a purpose, nor curse any man in the name of God. Should I, God forbid, transgress it, I must not drink more than one cup of wine on that day exclusive of the blessing-cup. Should I, however, transgress this after dinner, I must abstain from wine the following day. Should I transgress it, I have to pay half a *Zehub*. Again, that I shall get up every night to praise God, to supplicate for His mercy, and to confess. On those nights when confession is not to be said (Sabbaths and Festivals), I shall say hymns and psalms. This I shall do when I am in my house, and in good health, free from any accident. Should I transgress it, I shall drink not more than one cup of wine the following day, except the blessing-cup. I again take upon myself to give in charity the following proportion of my expenditure — from each dress which I shall have made for myself or for one member of my family, costing more than ten *Zehubs*, I must pay one *Pashut*³⁸ for each ten *Zehubs*. Again, if I should buy an animal, or a slave, or a female slave, or ground, that I shall also pay at the same rate. And if I shall buy clothes for sale, called *fashas*, I shall pay two *Pashuts* for each garment. As often as I have occasion to say the benediction of thanksgiv-

ings for having escaped danger I shall pay a *Zehub*, except when I am travelling [also involving danger in those times!], in which case I shall have to pay a *Zehub* on my arrival, and two *Pashuts* daily during the journey. Again, from every kind of fish bought for me, costing more than a *Zehub*, I shall pay a *Pashut* for each *Zehub*. And also, if I shall be deemed worthy by God to marry my children, and to be present at their wedding, to cause them to give to the poor from the dowry brought to them by their wives, whether in money or in kind, at the rate of one per cent. If God will find me worthy of having sons, I must give in charity according to my means at the time.

I shall also, between New Year and the Day of Atonement in each year, calculate my profits during the past year and (after deducting expenses) give a tithe thereof to the poor. Should I be unable to make an accurate calculation, then I shall give approximately. This tithe I shall put aside, together with the other money for religious (charitable) purpose, to dispose of it as I shall deem best. I also propose to have the liberty of employing the money in any profitable speculation with a view to augmenting it. But in respect of all I have written above I shall not hold myself guilty if I transgress, if such transgression be the result of forgetfulness; but in order to guard against it, I shall read this through weekly.

I also command my children to take upon themselves as many of the above regulations as may be in their power to observe, and also to bind them (*i.e.* the regulations), from generation to generation, upon their children. And he who carries them out, and even adds to them, at pain of discomfort to himself, shall merit a special blessing. And this is the text of the will which I, the above-mentioned Solomon, draw up for my children, may God preserve them. That they shall pray thrice daily, and endeavour always to utter their prayers with devotion. Again, that this prayer shall be said in the *Beth Hammidrash*, or in the synagogue together with the congregation. Again, that they shall apply all their powers to maintain the synagogues and the houses of study, which our ancestors have built, as well as to continue the endowments established by my ancestors and myself. They must always en-

deavour to imitate them, so that goodness shall never cease from among them. Again, that they shall always have a chair on which a volume of the Talmud, or some other Talmudical work, shall lie; so that they shall always open a book when they come home. At least, they shall read in any book they like four lines before taking their meal. Again, that they shall every week read the Lesson twice in the Hebrew text, and once in the Aramaic version. Again, to take three meals on the Sabbath . . .

Again, that they shall be always modest, merciful, and charitable, for these are the qualities by which the children of Israel are known. Let also all their thoughts and meditations be always directed to the service of the Lord, and be as charitable and benevolent as possible, for this is all that remains to man of his labour. They shall also endeavour to regulate their diet according to the rules laid down by Rabbi Moses (b. Maimon, or Maimonides), so as to fulfil the words of Scripture: "The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul." And let them always be careful not to take the name of God in vain, to be honest in all business transactions, and let their yea be always yea. They shall always be under the obligation to train their children to the Study of the Torah, but one shall devote his life exclusively to the study thereof. And it shall be incumbent upon his brothers to support this one, and to invest his moneys, and to provide for him that he and his family may live respectably, so that he be not distracted by worldly cares from his studies. Let also the elder love the younger brothers as their own children, and the younger respect the elder as a parent. Thus they may always bear in mind that they are of a God-fearing family. Let them love and honour scholars, thus to merit the honour of having scholars for their sons and sons-in-law. This will they shall themselves read weekly, and shall also make it incumbent upon their children, from generation to generation, to read weekly, in order to fulfil what is written (Gen. xviii. 19), "For I know him that he will command his children," etc., and also the words of Isaiah (lix. 21), "And this is my covenant," etc. But as often as they shall read this will, they shall also read the two letters below written, which Rabbi Moses ben Nachman sent to his sons, with a view of being serviceable to them in many re-

spects. Should, heaven forbid, they be by any sad accident prevented from fulfilling the injunctions above laid down, they must fine themselves by not drinking wine on that day, or by eating one course less at the dinner, or by giving some fine in charity. . . .

And this is the letter which the above-mentioned Rabbi sent from the Holy Land to Castile, when his son was staying before the king (in his service):—

“ . . . May God bless you and preserve you from sin and punishment. Behold, our master, King David, had a son, wise and of an understanding heart, like unto whom there was never one before or after. Nevertheless he said to him (1 Kings ii. 2): ‘And keep the charge of the Lord thy God,’ etc. He also said to him: ‘And thou, my son, know the God of thy father’ (1 Chron. xxviii. 9). Now, my son, if thou wilt measure thyself with Solomon, thou wilt find thyself a worm — not a man, merely an insect; nevertheless, if thou wilt seek God, he will make thee great; and if thou wilt forsake him, thou wilt be turned out and forsaken. My son, be careful that thou read the *Shema*²⁹ morning and evening, as well as that thou say the daily prayers. Have always with thee a Pentateuch written correctly, and read therein the Lesson for each Sabbath. . . . ‘Cast thy burden upon the Lord,’ for the thing which thou believest far from thee is often very near unto thee. Know, again, that thou art not master over thy words, nor hast power over thy hand; but everything is in the hand of the Lord, who formeth thy heart. . . . Be especially careful to keep aloof from the women [of the court?]. Know that our God hates immorality, and Balaam could in no other way injure Israel than by inciting them to unchastity. [Here come many quotations from Malachi and Ezra.] . . . My son, remember me always, and let the image of my countenance be never absent from before thine eyes. Love not that which I hate. . . . Let the words of the Psalmist be always upon thy lips, ‘I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me’ (Ps. cxix. 19); and God, who is good and the dispenser of good, shall increase thy peace and prolong thy life in peace and happiness, and promote thy honour according to thy wish and the wish of thy father who begat thee, Moses ben Nachman.”

V

A JEWISH BOSWELL

THERE is a saying in the Talmud "Nothing exists of which there is not some indication in the Torah." These words are often quoted, and some modern authors have pressed them so far as to find even the discoveries of Columbus and the inventions of Watt and Stephenson indicated in the Law. This is certainly misapplied ingenuity. But it is hardly an exaggeration to maintain that there is no noble manifestation of real religion, no expression of real piety, reverence, and devotion, to which Jewish literature would not offer a fair parallel.

Thus it will hardly be astonishing to hear that Jewish literature has its Boswell to show, more than three centuries before the Scottish gentleman came to London to admire his Johnson, and more than four centuries before the Sage of Chelsea delivered his lectures on Hero Worship. And this Jewish Boswell was guided only by the motives suggested to him in the old Rabbinic literature. In this literature the reverence for the great man, and the absorption of one's whole self in him, went so far that one Rabbi declared that the whole world was only created to serve such a man as company.¹

Again, the fact that, in the language of the Rabbis, the term for studying the Law and discussing it is "to

attend" or rather "to serve the disciples of the Wise" may also have led people to the important truth that the great man is not a lecturing machine, but a sort of living Law himself. "When the man," said one Rabbi, "has wholly devoted himself to the Torah, and thoroughly identified himself with it, it becomes almost his own Torah." Thus people have not only to listen to his words but to observe his whole life, and to profit from all his actions and movements.

This was what the Jewish Boswell sought to do. His name was Rabbi Solomon, of St. Goar, a small town on the Rhine, while the name of the master whom he served was R. Jacob, the Levite, better known by his initials Maharil, who filled the office of Chief Rabbi in Mayence and Worms successively. The main activity of Maharil falls in the first three decades of the fifteenth century. Those were troublous times for a Rabbi. For the preceding century with its persecution and sufferings—one has only to think of the Black Death and its terrible consequences for the Jews—led to the destruction of the great Schools, the decay of the study of the Law, and to the dissolution of many congregations. Those which remained lost all touch with each other, so that almost every larger Jewish community had its own *Minhag* or ritual custom.²

It was Maharil who brought some order into this chaos, and in the course of time his influence asserted itself so strongly that the rules observed by him in the performing of religious ceremonies were accepted by the great majority of the Jewish communities. Thus the personality of Maharil himself became a standing *Minhag*, suppressing all the other *Minhagim* (customs).

But there must have been something very strong and very great about the personality of the man who could succeed in such an arduous task. For we must not forget that the Minhag or custom in its decay degenerates into a kind of religious fashion, the worst disease to which religion is liable, and the most difficult to cure. It is therefore an irreparable loss both for Jewish literature and for Jewish history, that the greatest part of Maharil's posthumous writings are no longer extant, so that our knowledge about him is very small. But the little we know of him we owe chiefly to the communicativeness of his servant, the Solomon of St. Goar whom I mentioned above.

Solomon not only gave us the "Customs" of his master, but also observed him closely in all his movements, and conscientiously wrote down all that he saw and heard, under the name of *Collectanea*. It seems that the bulk of these *Collectanea* was also lost. But in the fragments that we still possess we are informed, among other things, how Maharil addressed his wife, how he treated his pupils, how careful he was in the use of his books, and even how clean his linen was. Is this not out-Boswelling Boswell?

The most striking point of agreement between the Boswell of the fifteenth and him of the eighteenth century, is that they both use the same passage from the Talmud to excuse the interest in trifles which their labours of love betrayed. Thus Solomon prefaces his *Collectanea* with the following words: "It is written, His leaf shall not wither. These words were explained by our Sages to mean that even the idle talk of the disciples of the wise deserves a study. Upon this interpretation I have relied. In my love to R. Jacob the Levite, I collected everything about him. I did not refuse even small things, though many

derided me. Everything I wrote down, for such was the desire of my heart."

Thus far Solomon. Now, if we turn to the introduction to Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, we read the following sentence: "For this almost superstitious reverence, I have found very old and venerable authority quoted by our great modern prelate, Secker, in whose tenth sermon there is the following passage: 'Rabbi Kimchi, a noted Jewish commentator who lived about five hundred years ago, explains that passage in the first Psalm, "His leaf also shall not wither" from Rabbins yet older than himself, that even the idle talk, so he expressed it, of a good man ought to be regarded.'"

Croker's note to this passage sounds rather strange. This editor says: "Kimchi was a Spanish Rabbi, who died in 1240. One wonders that Secker's good sense should have condescended to quote this far-fetched and futile interpretation of the simple and beautiful metaphor, by which the Psalmist illustrates the prosperity of the righteous man." Now Kimchi died at least five years earlier than Croker states, but dates, we know from Macaulay's essay on the subject, were not Croker's strong point. But one can hardly forgive the editor of Boswell this lack of sympathy. Had he known what strong affinity there was between his most Christian author and the humble Jew Solomon, he would have less resented this condescension of Archbishop Secker.

As for the Jewish Boswell himself, we know very little about him. The only place in which he speaks about his own person is that in which he derives his pedigree from R. Eleazar ben Samuel Hallevi (died 1357), and says that he was generally called "Der gute (the good) R. Salman."

He well deserved this appellation. In his Will we find the following injunction to his children: "Be honest, and conscientious in your dealing with men, with Jews as well as Gentiles, be kind and obliging to them; do not speak what is superfluous." And wisdom is surely rare enough to render inappropriate a charge of superfluosness against the work of those who in bygone times spent their energies in gathering the crumbs that fell from the tables of the wise.